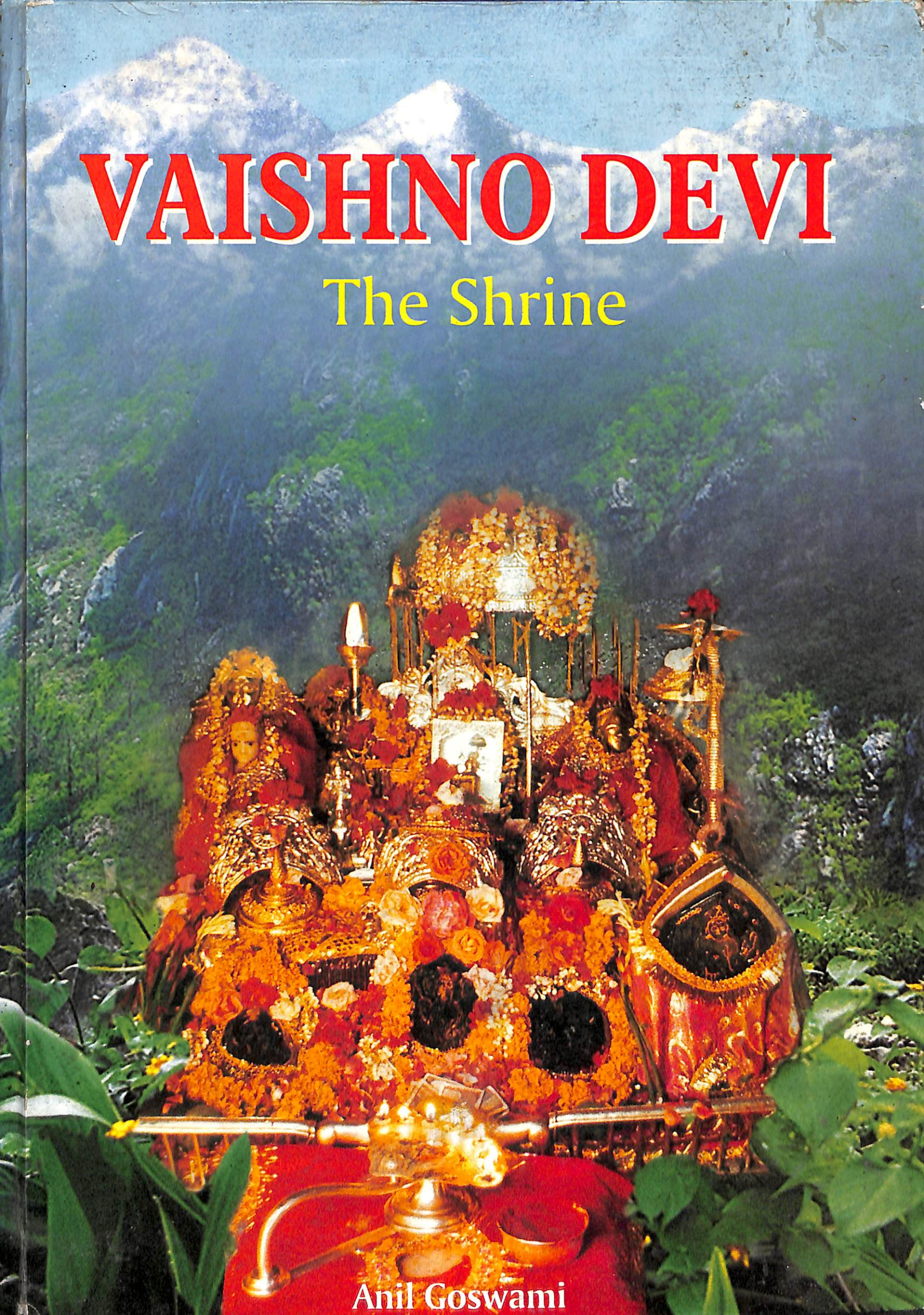
VAISHNO DEVI

The Shrine



Anil Goswami

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Tiedekirjasto Jyväskylä Kasvatusala (Kokeila)
Oppi Pasta. Oulusa.
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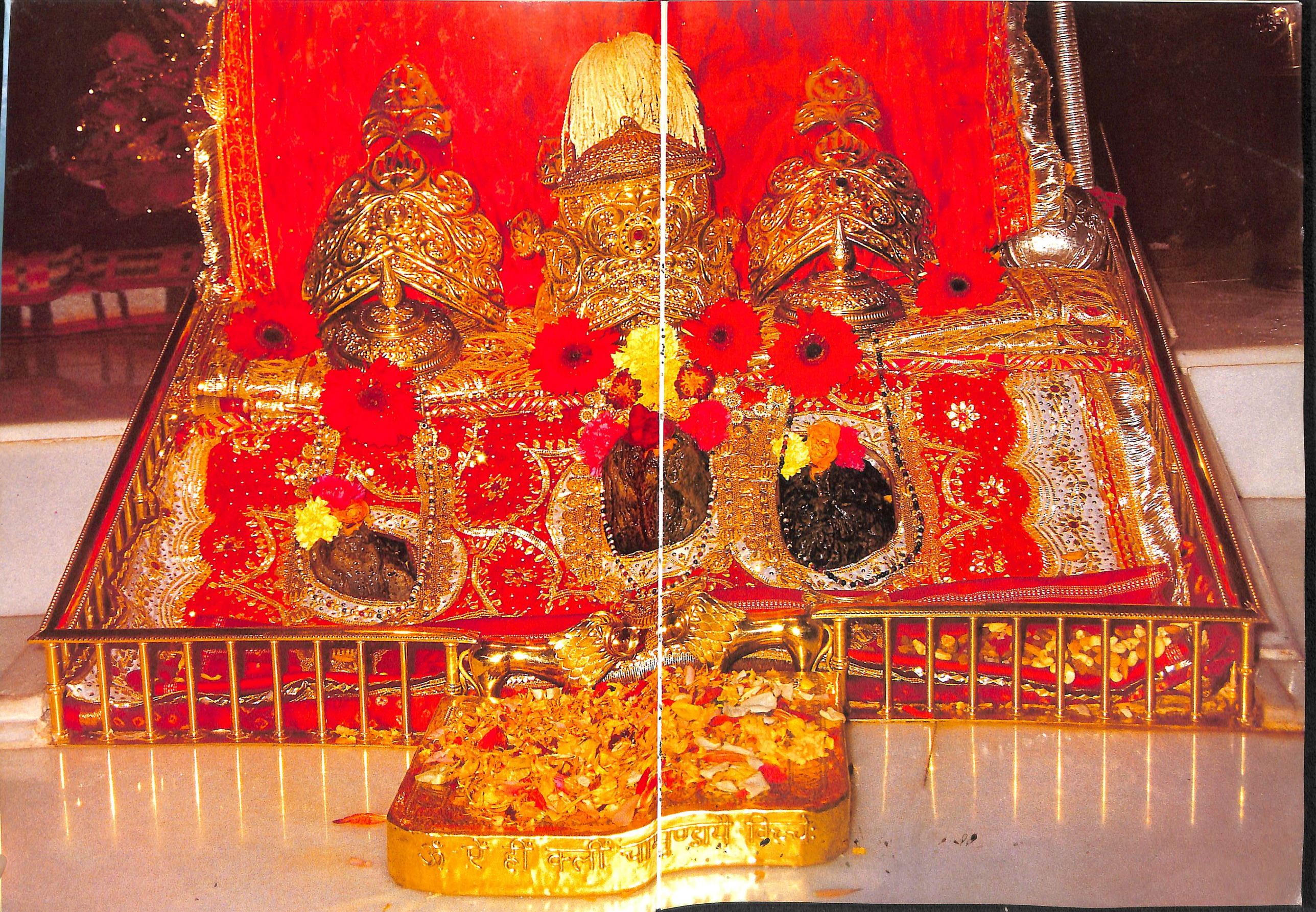

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VAISHNO DEVI

The Shrine

ANIL GOSWAMI

THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED TO MY PARENTS
MR.VED PRAKASH AND MRS. PUSHPA GOSWAMI,
MY WIFE NEERU AND
MY SONS
BHANU UDAY AND MAYANK

ANIL GOSWAMI

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

A large number of people helped in making this book possible. Since it is not possible to thank each one of them personally, I convey my thanks to all of them through these lines. Special thanks are, however, due to some people and organisations and if I did not name them specifically, I would be remiss in my duty. My wife Neeru cajoled and coaxed me into writing it while she simultaneously soothed my apprehensions. Pandit Vishwa Murti helped in preparing the general translations to the SHLOKAS in the AARTI. Mr. Jaswant Lal Kuthiala and Dr. Atul Kuthiala helped in editing the book. Mr. Sudarshan and Mrs. Kanta Mahajan provided constant moral support and Mr. R.K. Gupta helped to select the photographs for the book. Thanks are also due to the National Museum, the Department of Archives and Libraries, Govt. of J&K and Mrs. Rita Chaudhrie whose paintings have been used in the section pertaining to Mythology. I also thank the photographers, Mr. Shishu Pal and Mr. Anil Gaba, whose photographs have been used in this book. The typing work was done by Mr. Ramesh Chander Gupta, my old and trusted colleague who possesses admirable patience and fortitude. Ho too deserves special thanks.

Once again, thank you all.

Anil Goswami

FOREWORD

The holy Shrine of Vaishno Devi Ji is visited by lakhs of pilgrims every year. Indeed, the number of pilgrims coming for Darshan has been rising every year, especially since 1986 when the management and administration of the holy Shrine was taken over by a statutory Board set up under the Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine Act, 1986. Most of these pilgrims are very keen to know the myths, legends and stories associated with the Shrine. Many others are curious to know about the various developments that have taken place since the management of the Shrine was put on a permanent footing. Unfortunately there was nothing comprehensive enough with which the curiosity of the pilgrims could be assuaged. Of course, there was some literature available in the market but it was sketchy and usually did not satisfy the inquisitive reader. It was, therefore, felt that an attempt should be made to write a book where most of the information sought by the pilgrim could be available at one place. The present book is the result of this effort.

A substantial part of the book has been written in the first person and the pronoun "we" has been used quite liberally. This is due to the fact that most of the work that was done for developing the area at and enroute the holy Shrine was done by me and my colleagues. It was a team effort and I felt that it would not be fair to my colleagues to write in the third person as that would impart it a very impersonal touch. There is nothing impersonal about our feeling for the holy Shrine. We ache for it.

The initial thrust to the development of the area of the holy Shrine was provided by Mr. Jagmohan during his tenure as Governor of Jammu and Kashmir (1984-89) especially from September 1986 onwards. We worked at break neck speed during those days to show the world that we could make a difference and we succeeded. The tenure of Mr. Girish Chandra Saxena as Governor witnessed a period of consolidation. The new Board became financially stronger and more mature . General K.V.Krishna Rao's tenure as Governor saw the Shrine Board breaking new grounds. Ambitious new schemes were drawn up and taken up for execution. The work that was done at Vaishno Devi Ji could not have been accomplished without the unstinted and total support of the Board that was managing the affairs of the holy Shrine. Indeed, it would be difficult to find a Board that could have been more understanding and generous. And throughout this period, dynamic officers of Jammu and Kashmir were working with dedication to convert dreams into realities.

Enormous work has gone in to making the area of the holy Shrine what it is today. No person could have done it single handedly. In fact, some of the finest officers of Jammu and Kashmir worked tirelessly to create something we could all be proud of. Of course, nothing is ever perfect. Nevertheless, the arrangements put into position for managing the yatra to Vaishno Devi Ji are fairly efficient and they work. That is reason enough to feel proud.

ANIL GOSWAMI

Jammu

The stories about the arrival of Mata Vaishno Devi Ji on the Trikuta mountain and the discovery of the holy Shrine by Pandit Shridhar are based on local folk lore. The mythological stories have been culled from the Puranic texts, especially the SANKSHIPT SRIMAD DEVI BHAGWAT. The section dealing with the developmental activities at and enroute Vaishno Devi Ji has been based upon official record and the portion pertaining to the ownership of land is based upon the Revenue Records. On occasion, gaps have been filled up with information based upon personal knowledge.

A glossary has been given at the end of the book where the meanings of the words which are unfamiliar to most readers of the English language have been explained.

AUTHOR

CONTENTS

		PAGE
1.	**PRELUDE**	11
	PART - I	
	THE SHRINE	
2.	The Story of Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Ji	15
3.	The Discovery of the Shrine	27
4.	The Holy Cave	35
5.	The Route to the Holy Cave	63
6.	Aarti	87
	PART - II	
	THE MYTHOLOGY	
7.	The Story of Madhu & Kaitabh	95
8.	The Story of Mahishasura	99
9.	The Story of Vritrasura	107
10.	The Story of Indra's Penance	114
11.	The Story of Asura Hayagriva	121
12.	The Story of Shumbha and Nishumbha	125
13.	War between Devas and Asuras and its Resolution by the Goddess	143
	PART - III	
	THE MANAGEMENT	
14.	The State of Things Before the Takeover	152
15.	The Takeover	157
16.	Agitation launched by the Baridaars	164
17.	Mr. Jagmohan's visit after the Takeover	167
18.	Development of the Track	171
19.	Water Supply	181
20.	Supply of Electricity	183
21.	Sanitation	187
22.	Food & Refreshment Units	193
23.	Afforestation	197
24.	Development of Sanji Chhat	207
25.	Development of Bhawan	217
26.	Development of Bhairo Ghati	233
27.	Other Activities of the Board	237
28.	Major projects of the future	243
	PART - IV	
29.	Information for Pilgrims	245
	PART - V	
	ANNEXURES	
30.	The Jammu and Kashmir Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine Act, 1986	260
31.	The Jammu and Kashmir Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine Act, 1988	262
32.	The Management Before The Takeover by the Board	264
33.	Regulations Regarding Shri Devi Trikuta Ji	
	(a) As contained in AIN-I-DHARMARTH	266
	(b) Regulations for the guidance of Ganpatshah, Brahman, deputed to the Shrine of Shri Devi Trikuta Ji issued on 2nd Assuj 1941	268
34.	Traditional routes to Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Ji	270
35.	Aarti (Mantras with Translation)	272
36.	Glossary	281

PRELUDE

I went to Vaishno Devi Ji for the first time in 1975. It was in the month of May. My M.A. (Previous) examinations had just concluded when my friend Krishan Singh suggested that we should go to the Holy Shrine for Darshan. I agreed. We started in the afternoon by bus from Jammu and reached Katra in the evening. We had dinner at a *dhaba* in Katra and around 8 PM we commenced our journey to the Shrine. The track from *Darshani Darwaza* onwards was unpaved and there were no lights. We had been warned of this and were carrying torches so that we could see where we were stepping. Sharp stones were protruding everywhere on the track and seemed to be fiercely determined to twist the ankle of any unwary pilgrim who dared to lift his eyes from the ground or switched off his torch while walking. The situation would be complicated further by the appearance of a pony carrying a pilgrim which would suddenly loom out of the darkness, forcing us to quickly move over to one side. After about five hours of walking on this treacherous track we reached Vaishno Devi Ji. There was a considerable rush of pilgrims there. After taking a bath we went for *Darshan*.

The experience in the cave was quite unnerving. There was only one opening through which the pilgrims were going in and coming out. There appeared to be very little regulation of the movement of the pilgrims. We also managed to push and crawl our way into the cave. Inside the cave the situation was even more difficult. It was poorly lit. The space in which a person could move was very narrow and slippery and every one was wading through ankle deep water. People were jostling each other, some in their eagerness to reach the sanctum sanctorum for *Darshan* and others in their keenness to get out of the cave after having *Darshan*. There was a cacophony of noise with the *Jaikaras* of the Goddess mingling with the plaintive wailing of little children who appeared to be terrified by the noise, the darkness and the suffocation inside the cave. After a perfunctory *Darshan*, we thought probably due to the rush of pilgrims, we were pushed away and came out of the cave. It was only later that we learnt that we had been allowed a perfunctory *Darshan* because we had offered only five rupees each at the Shrine. We learnt that there were many people who were allowed a much longer Darshan because they would offer large sums of money.

Dawn had broken by the time we came out of the Shrine. I was appalled to see the filth everywhere. Shops selling eatables were thronged with people who were eating while

surrounded by unbelieveable squalor. Per chance, I espied a *Kanya Pujan* being performed by a group of devotees. A dozen or so young girls (known locally as *Kanjaks*) were being given *PURI HALWA* with some money (currency notes) placed on top as *Dakshina*. I saw these girls accept the *Dakshina* ; then with their left hand they removed the money and with their right hand they passed on the Puri Halwa to the shopkeeper's servant who was standing behind them, probably for this very purpose. The servant promptly returned the Puri Halwa to the respective containers from which these had been purchased in the first instance. The stench, the filth, the casual air of every one and the avarice of the shopkeepers and the *Kanjaks* convinced me that the whole thing was a farce as no super natural being could be present at a place that displayed so much human degradation. I, therefore, swore to myself that I would never come to this place again to waste my time and energy.

Time passed. In 1978 I was selected for the IAS. I was allotted J&K Cadre. After completing my probation I was posted as Deputy Secretary to the Government, Tourism Department, J&K. Vaishno Devi Ji attracted quite a large number of people from outside the State even then. Thus, I became associated with the Shrine again. My second posting was as S.D.M. Reasi, who was also designated the "*Yatra Officer*" for the pilgrimage to Vaishno Devi Ji and was thus directly associated with regulating the pilgrimage. However, things had hardly improved during the six years that intervened between my first visit to the Shrine and my second visit there in my official capacity. I was again confronted with the same squalor and commercialisation, which had so sickened me in the past, during my second and subsequent visits.

During my tenure as S.D.M. Reasi, I discovered that there were a number of organisations which were supposedly responsible for the maintenance of the Shrine. There was the *Dharmarth* Trust which managed the entire land which belonged to the Shrine and earned a lot of money from the yatra. There were the *Baridaars* who collected the offerings that were made by the pilgrims at the sanctum sanctorum. Neither of them appeared to be bothered very much about the welfare of the hapless pilgrim. The State Government did provide some basic amenities to the vast multitude of people who went to the Shrine for performing the pilgrimage but it did not wish to step on too many toes for fear of being accused of interfering in the religious affairs of the Hindus. This was so, because whenever any conscientious officer had moved to regulate things he was branded a communalist by the vested interests and hounded out of the district. The Government had also constituted a Cabinet Sub-Committee

on *Yatra* affairs which, besides some Ministers of the State Government, also included representatives of *Dharmarth* Trust, *Baridaars* and residents of Katra. The Committee was supposed to meet at least once every year and take all important decisions pertaining to the Yatra. However, during my tenure of more than two years as S.D.M. Reasi I did not find this Committee achieving anything substantial. The decisions that were taken remained on paper only as there never seemed to be any money available to implement them.

From Reasi I was posted to the State Secretariat. After a brief assignment lasting a few months in the Secretariat, I was posted as Dy. Commissioner, Udhampur. The Shrine of Vaishno Devi Ji fell in the jurisdiction of district Udhampur. However, the situation regarding the development of facilities at the Shrine remained more or less the same as before. Some improvements of a temporary nature would take place, especially with regard to hygiene, whenever I visited the Shrine, but things would revert to their original state shortly thereafter. Thus things remained extremely unsatisfactory. Then on 30th Aug. 1986, the then Governor of J&K, Mr. Jagmohan, promulgated the Jammu and Kashmir Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine Act, 1986 and directed me as Dy. Commissioner, Udhampur to take over the management and administration of the Shrine on behalf of the Board which had been set up under the new Act. Immediately thereafter I was posted as the Chief Executive Officer of the Board. I continued to hold this charge for twelve years.

I do not know whether my postings were coincidental or providential, but they did ensure that I remained associated with the Shrine constantly. I, however, began to believe that there was a design behind the whole thing and probably "Mata" wanted that I should become aware of the difficulties faced by the pilgrims so that I could do something to improve the state of affairs whenever She provided the opportunity. Thus, from a person who used to scoff at the idea that there was any supernatural presence at the Shrine of "Vaishno Devi JI", I became a firm believer in Her existence there. I sincerely began to believe that the abode of MATA VAISHNO DEVI JI was in the Holy cave in the Trikuta mountain towering above Katra. My transformation was complete!

THE SHRINE

THE STORY OF SHRI MATA VAISHNO DEVI JI

Mythology claims that during the period when the Goddess was busy in destroying the various *Asuras*, one day her three main manifestations viz. Mata Maha Kali, Mata Maha Lakshmi and Mata Maha Saraswati got together and pooled their collective *Tejas* or spiritual strength. A stunningly bright light emanated from the place where the *Tejas* of the three manifestations coalesced and a beautiful young girl emerged out of this *Tejas*. The young girl asked them, " Why have I been created ?" The *Devis* explained to her that they had created her so that she would live on earth and spend her time in upholding righteousness. The *Devis* added, "Now, go and take birth in the house of one Ratnakar and his wife who are great devotees of ours and who reside in the southern part of India. Live on earth. Uphold righteousness and evolve yourself spiritually so that you reach higher levels of consciousness. Once you have attained the appropriate level of consciousness you will merge into Vishnu and become one with him." So saying they blessed the girl.

Sometime later a very beautiful girl child was born to Ratnakar and his wife. The couple named the child Vaishnavi. Very soon Ratnakar realised that not only was his daughter extra ordinarily pretty but she appeared to be endowed with an uncommonly inquisitive and sharp mind. Realising the prodigious intellectual capability of his daughter, Ratnakar made arrangements for the best teachers in the area to come and teach her the sacred *Vedas* and other religious works of the period. Vaishnavi mastered these texts in a very short time and wanted her teachers to impart more and more knowledge . Unfortunately, however, her teachers were unable to quench her intense thirst for knowledge. Both Vaishnavi and her father, Ratnakar, were disappointed. Ratnakar advised his daughter to immerse her mind in contemplating upon the Creator of the Universe so that she could obtain the answers to some of the questions which seemed to vex her. Vaishnavi agreed and soon learnt the art of going into deep meditation.

As a result of her meditation, Vaishnavi increased her latent spiritual power considerably. One day Vaishnavi told her father, "Father, I have lived long enough in your house and the time has now come for me to go into the forest and meditate upon the Creator with even greater devotion and intensity so that I can attain Him". Ratnakar and his wife had realised a long time ago that the Goddess had blessed them with an uncommon child. They had, therefore, over the years learnt to accept the peculiar habits and traits of their child. When Vaishnavi sought their permission for going to the forest, they felt sad at the thought of losing their daughter. However, they realised that the girl

Rameshwaram

had already made up her mind and would not be dissuaded from the course of action that she had decided to adopt. So, reluctantly they gave their permission.

Vaishnavi went deep into the forest and immersed herself in intense *Tapasaya*. After some time she attained a very high level of spirituality and word spread around that a sage of great accomplishment was residing in the forest. Soon people began to trickle into the forest in order to meet her and seek her intervention in resolving their mundane problems. When the flow of people coming into the forest to meet her became unending, Vaishnavi decided to leave the forest and go to some other place where she could continue her *Tapasaya* undisturbed. One night, Vaishnavi quietly left her *Ashram* in the forest and went to a far off place along the sea in the general area of modern day Rameshwaram. There, away from prying eyes, she once again immersed herself in *Tapasaya*. The objective behind her intense devotion was her desire to merge her being in Vishnu. Some time later she realised through her spiritual attainments that Vishnu had been incarnated on earth and was living as Ram. Vaishnavi was very happy because she felt that now she would be able to fulfil her desire of merging in Vishnu very soon.

Meanwhile, Ram was sent to the forest for fourteen years by his father under the influence of his favourite wife Kaikayee. During this period, Ravan, the *Asura* king of Lanka, abducted Ram's wife, Sita, and carried her away to Lanka. Ram mobilised an army in order to wage war upon Ravan and rescue his wife. He decided to launch his campaign from the place known in the present day as Rameshwaram. While Ram was preparing for war, his advisors suggested to him that he should propitiate all the gods and goddesses and also seek the blessings of the holy men and women living nearby before starting his campaign so that he could be victorious in the war. Ram agreed. During the course of this activity, Ram learnt that there was a very spiritually advanced *Sadhavi* who resided nearby and thought that it would be appropriate to seek her blessings too. Ram accordingly went to the *Ashram* of Vaishnavi in order to seek her blessings.

Vaishnavi was immersed in her prayers when Ram went to meet her. When she opened her eyes and found Ram standing in front of her, she immediately recognised him. Ram asked her to bless his proposed campaign against Ravan so that he could be victorious in the war that lay ahead. Vaishnavi happily told him that all her good wishes were already with him because she had decided to merge herself in him a long time ago. When Ram appeared surprised on hearing Vaishnavi, She laughed and said, "I know who you are Ram. You are Vishnu's incarnation and have come to the World to rid it of the evil that is personified by Ravan. That is your aim and I bless you for it. However, my aim is different. It is to merge myself in you so that I can become one with the Supreme Creator." When Ram still feigned ignorance,

Ram entering Vaishnavi's Ashram

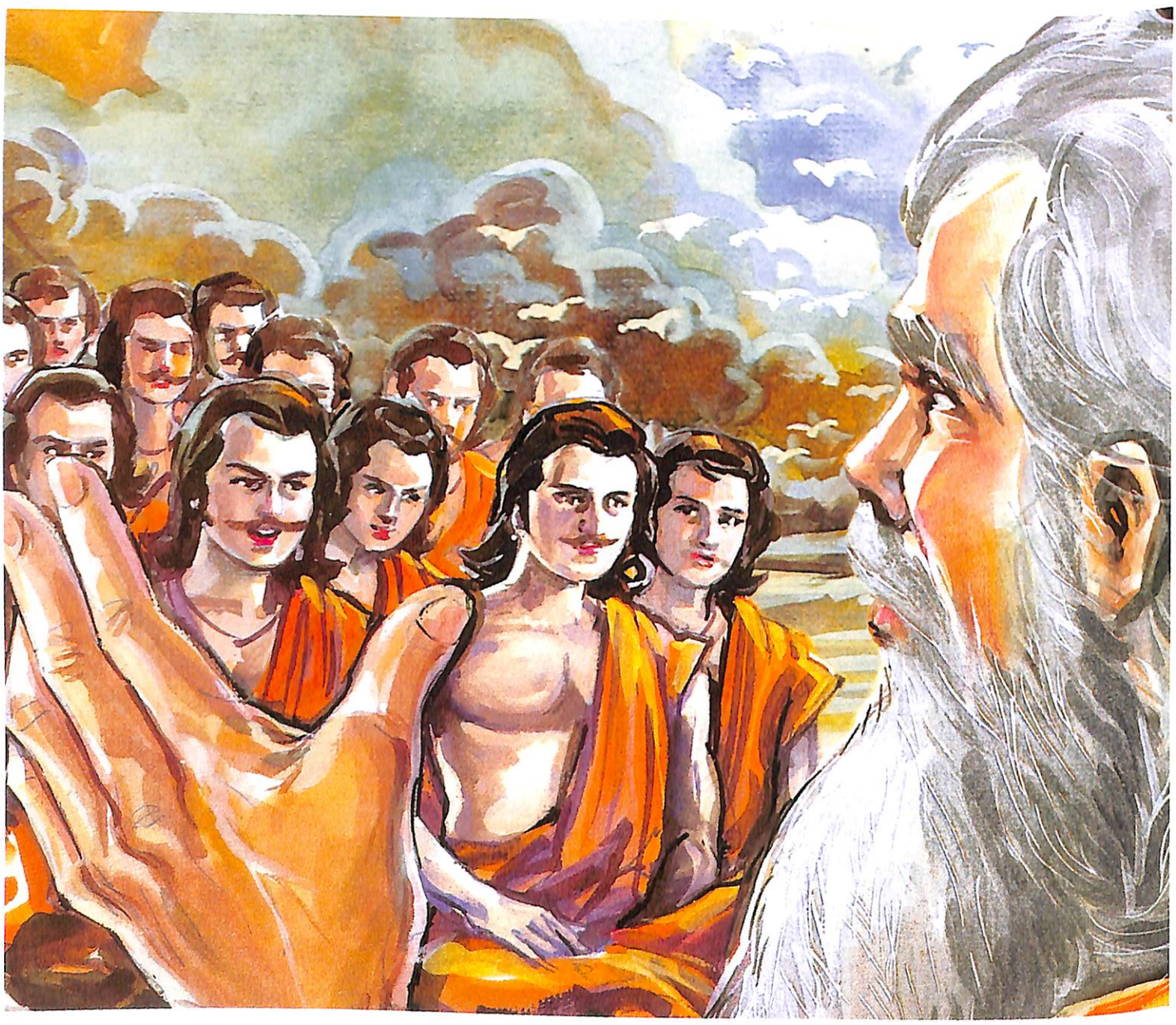
Vaishnavi said, "Ram, you have no choice but to accept me because I have been praying very hard for a long time for this". When Ram found that Vaishnavi could not be dissuaded from the stand she had taken, he left after promising that he would return to her Ashram after the end of the war and if she was successful in recognising him, he would consider her wish. After Ram left the Ashram, Vaishnavi once again busied herself in her prayers.

Ram defeated Ravan and rescued Sita. After the war was over, Ram remembered his promise to Vaishnavi. So he decided to visit her Ashram once again. This time Ram went to her *Ashram* disguised as an old man. Vaishnavi was unable to recognise him. While leaving her Ashram Ram revealed himself to Vaishnavi and said that since she had been unable to recognise him, he was freed from his promise to her. When Vaishnavi realised the enormity of her lapse she was inconsolable with grief. Ram then gently told her, "Vaishanvi, you have not yet attained the spiritual level that is required before you can merge your being into Vishnu. You still have a long way to go. However, do not lose heart. Continue your *Tapasya*. In time you will be rewarded. If you are able to keep up with your *Tapasya* then in my incarnation as Kalki during *Kaliyug*, I shall accept you as my *Shakti*." Ram then urged her to go to the northern region of India and set up her *Ashram* at the base of the Trikuta mountain. The peculiarity of this mountain, he said, was that it had three peaks and each peak was shaped like a hut or *Kutia*. Therefore, its three peaks looked like three huts or *three Kutias*. Ram added, "Vaishnavi you will have no difficulty in recognising the place. Go there and immerse yourself in contemplating upon me. When the time is opportune, I shall come and accept you and allow you to merge into me. Meanwhile, as you keep on advancing spiritually, mankind will learn about you. They will then start coming to your abode to seek your blessings and favours. Be kind. Bless them. Grant them their wishes. Your presence on the Trikuta mountain will, over a period of time, render the place so holy that people will elevate it to the status of a *Tirath sthan* and a constant stream of humanity will flow to your abode. Do not get vexed with this never ending flow of people. Remember, that each one of them contains a spark of me. Thus they will in reality be I who will be worshipping you constantly. Be generous and help them over come their frailties so that gradually they are able to raise themselve high enough in the wheel of life and death and attain *Moksha*. Always remember that you are already blessed. So, it is they who need your help and forbearance. As you grant more and more boons, your fame will spread far and wide till a stage will arrive when the entire world will come to you and pay obeisance. That is the time I shall come and accept you. So, do not waver. Remain steadfast and worship me. I bless you." So saying, Ram left.

Vaishnavi decided to proceed northward as directed by Ram. After a lot of adventures she finally reached the Trikuta mountain and set up her Ashram at the place known today as Bhumika

near the present day town of Katra and immersed herself in intense *Tapasaya* in order to overcome whatever spiritual shortcomings she still had. Vaishnavi continued to perform her *Tapasaya* in this manner for thousands of years and attained extra ordinary spiritual heights. In fact, she evolved her latent spiritual capabilities to such an extent that she came at par with her creators—Goddesses Maha Kali, Maha Lakshmi and Maha Saraswati.

Thousands of years later a person by the name of Gorakh Nath was able to achieve a very high level of spirituality through his mastery of the *Tantric* art. One day while he was immersed in his prayers the entire episode of Vaishnavi and Ram flashed before his mind's eye. He then became curious to find out whether the young woman, Vaishnavi, had been able to continue to lead a life of piety and devotion or had fallen by the way side. Gorakh Nath took some of his disciples along and began to roam around in search of Vaishnavi. One day, while he and his disciples were moving around near the river Devak which flows quite close to the



Gorakh Nath with disciples

Ban Ganga

present day city of Jammu in Jammu and Kashmir they learnt about the presence of a *Sadhavi* who had attained extra-ordinary spiritual power and who lived somewhere at the base of the Trikuta mountain. Gorakh Nath felt that this *Sadhavi* must be none other than the Vaishnavi he had been looking for. So, he sent his chief disciple Bhairo Nath to go to the *Ashram* of this *Sadhavi* to find out whether she was still pious and holy and return with a full report. Then Gorakh Nath departed for his own *Ashram*.

Bhairo Nath made his way through dense forests to the base of the Trikuta mountain and learnt about the location of the *Ashram* of Vaishnavi through the people living nearby. He set up his own *Ashram* quite close to Vaishnavi's *Ashram* and began to follow her movements. Bhairo Nath was quite intrigued to see that even though Vaishnavi was a Sadhavi, she always carried a bow with a quiver full of arrows and a *Trishul* and she was always surrounded by black faced monkeys known in the local language as *Langoors*. He also noticed that a wild and ferocious lion would often come to her *Ashram*. Once inside her *Ashram*, the lion would become very gentle, but the moment it slipped out of her Ashram it once again became its ferocious, wild self. Other things about Vaishnavi also intrigued him. Even though she was ineffably beautiful yet she seemed to be totally unaware of her beauty. She did not go out to the forest to collect berries and other fruit for food as the other sages did. And very often she would disappear for days together. What she did then or where she went no one seemed to know. Bhairo Nath, however, continued to study her movements so that he could learn more about the places she frequented and the people she met.

Once he knew the routine of Vaishnavi, he began to wait for her at various places which she frequented. He also tried to get friendly with Vaishnavi but received no encourgement from her. However, he continued to follow her and pester her until in exasperation Vaishnavi changed her routine to prevent Bhairo Nath from bothering her. Bhairo Nath, however, was not dismayed and decided that henceforth he would wait outside her *Ashram* and follow Vaishnavi wherever she went. By and by Bhairo Nath became bolder and bolder in his advances till finally he began to openly ask her to come and live with him as his wife. Vaishnavi was furious at Bhairo Nath's temerity and scolded him very severely. However, her anger left him unfazed. Soon, he began to even enter the *Ashram* of Vaishnavi with impunity and began to pass lewd comments and make suggestive actions whenever he saw her.

Offended by Bhairo Nath's persistently lecherous conduct, she decided to leave her *Ashram* and go up the Trikuta mountain to get away from him. One day, therefore, she quietly left. The *langoors* also went with her. While Vaishnavi was passing through a ravine on her way to the mountain the langoors accompanying her felt very thirsty. There was no water nearby. So, Vaishnavi took out an arrow from her quiver and shot it into

the ground. The arrow pierced the ground and went deep in to the earth where it encountered an aquifer of crystal clear water. This water burst out of the earth in a great gush. The *langoors* quenched their thirst. Vaishnavi also drank some water and continued her trek up the mountain. This stream came to be known as Banganga.

From Banganga, Vaishnavi proceeded ahead up the mountain and after some time stopped on a high rock to collect her breath and check whether Bhairo Nath had started pursuing her. This place is now known as Charan Paduka. Vaishnavi then proceeded to a place half way up the mountain. There she saw a narrow cave which was well camouflaged. Since she did not see Bhairo Nath pursuing her she decided to stay in the cave and carry on her *Tapasaya* there.

Meanwhile, on finding out that Vaishnavi had disappeared, Bhairo Nath began to look for her. His search took him up the mountain and after some time he reached near the cave where Vaishnavi was performing *Tapasaya*. While searching the area Bhairo Nath was able to locate the cave and decided to see what lay inside. He entered the cave and saw Vaishnavi there. Realising that Bhairo Nath had not only located the cave but also entered it, Vaishnavi took hold of her *Trishul* and smashed open another way out of the cave. The place where she performed *Tapasya* came to be called Adhkwari.

Vaishnavi then swiftly went up the mountain with Bhairo Nath pursuing her. Even though Vaishnavi's patience was coming to the end of its tether she still held on to her temper and finally reached the holy cave on the mountain and entered it. However, before going into the cave she ordered the *langoors* to chase Bhairo Nath away. But Bhairo Nath was very powerful and the *langoors* were no match for him. He killed a few of them and chased the others away. Then one of the *langoors* scampered into the cave and told Vaishnavi that since Bhairo Nath was too strong for them, either Vaishnavi should transfer her power to the *langoors* to enable them to vanquish him or she should deal with Bhairo Nath herself. By now Vaishnavi's anger knew no bounds. In fury, she transformed herself into her divine form. From an ordinary looking mortal she suddenly became a supernatural being who was not only incredibly beautiful but also had awesome powers.

She had eight arms, each of which was carrying a weapon of war. She was dressed in red clothes and rode a ferocious lion. The lion bounded out of the cave with Vaishnavi mounted on him and before Bhairo Nath realised what was happening she struck him with a blow of her sword.

There was so much power behind the blow that Bhairo Nath's head flew away and fell on the next spur of the mountain almost one kilometre away. His torso, however, fell outside the mouth of the cave. Bhairo Nath did not die immediately even though he had been beheaded because of his own spiritual strength. Realising that he had exceeded the brief given to him by his *guru* and also that the person whose anger he had aroused was no ordinary

Mata beheading Bhairo

mortal but the Goddess herself, he was seized with mortification for his obnoxious behaviour. He begged Vaishnavi's forgivenness and told her that he had behaved in the manner he did only out of his desire to carry out the orders of his *guru* who wanted to test whether Vaishnavi was still pure and virtuous. When Vaishnavi saw that Bhairo Nath was truely repentant for his conduct, she forgave him and asked Bhairo Nath whether he wished to be restored to life. Bhairo Nath declined by saying that he could have never hoped for a more auspicious death than at the hands of the Goddess, because his death at her hands would ensure that he was freed from the wheel of life and death and attained *Moksha*. "What more can any mortal hope for?" Bhairo Nath said. He, however, added, "*Mata*, I am not a bad person. My conduct hither-to-fore has been pure. However, since you have beheaded me the world will presume that I must have been an evil person. The thought of this kind of notoriety is too terrible to contemplate. Please have mercy and arrange things in such a manner that the world and my *guru* do not think ill of me." Vaishnavi then assured Bhairo Nath that he would

The Holy Pindies

always be looked upon with respect by the pilgrims who came for her *Darshan* and their pilgrimage would be deemed to be complete only after they had had the *Darshan* of Bhairo Nath in his temple on their return journey. Satisfied, Bhairo Nath released his grip on life and died. With her spiritual strength Vaishnavi transformed Bhairo Nath's torso and head into stone so that they could last for aeons.

By now Vaishnavi had tired of all the hurdles she had to face constantly while performing her *Tapasaya* due to the human form which she had assumed. She, therefore, decided to petrify herself also into a rock and immerse herself in Tapasaya so that she could attain Vishnu in his incarnation as Kalki in *Kalyuga*. The rock form in which Vaishnavi converted herself is visible today as the Holy *'Pindies'* in the sanctum sanctorum. The three *Pindies* are the upper most part of that petrified rock which is five and a half feet tall. The three Pindies on the top are the three manifestitions of the Goddess in her forms as Maha Kali, Maha Lakshmi and Maha Saraswati signifying that spiritually she has become one with her creators. And now the world comes and bows before her and seeks her blessings and her boons.

THE DISCOVERY OF THE SHRINE

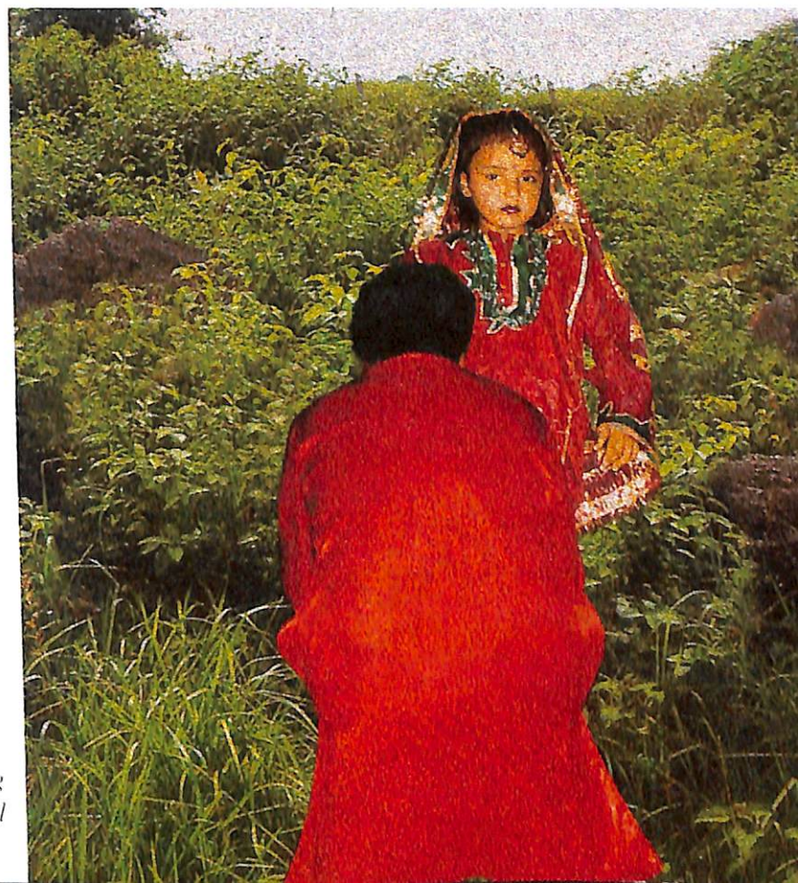
According to the legend, the holy Shrine of Vaishno Devi Ji was first discovered by Pandit Shridhar, about a thousand years ago. The story of the discovery runs something like this.

A Brahman named Shridhar used to live in village Hansali at the foot hills of the Trikuta mountain. This village is adjacent to the present town of Katra. Shridhar was a devotee of *Shakti* in her benign form. Even though he was a very poor man and had to depend upon doles of others for keeping his body and soul together, his face always radiated a glow of contentment and peace.

Shridhar used to spend most of his time in meditation and prayers. In fact, he would be chanting paens in praise of *Shakti* even when he took the cows and goats of the villagers for grazing on the mountain. One day, while he was grazing the cattle, a very pretty young girl aged between 8 to 10 years, met him on the hill. Shridhar felt strangely attracted towards her and the two of them became friendly. The girl told him that her name was Vaishnavi and she lived on the other side of the mountain. Thereafter, Shridhar would often meet the young girl on the mountain and the two of them would spend the day in playing, laughing and talking.

One day Shridhar wistfully mentioned to Vaishnavi that he had been to a *Bhandara* a couple of days ago which had been organised by a wealthy man of the area. A very large number of people had participated in the *Bhandara*, partaken of the food and before departing had blessed the man. Shridhar felt that the man who had organised the *Bhandara* would as a consequence have earned enormous spiritual merit. Hearing this, Vaishnavi urged Shridhar to organise a *Bhandara* too. Well aware of his own precarious financial position, Shridhar demurred. However, Vaishnavi continued to exhort him. After a few weeks she was able to coax him, against his better judgement, to organise the *Bhandara*. A date was agreed upon and then Shridhar left in order to make the arrangements for the function.

He invited all the people living in nearby



Shridhar playing with the girl

villages to the *Bhandara*. Thereafter, he began to go from door to door requesting his neighbours and acquaintances to give him the provisions which could be cooked and served to the guests on the day of *Bhandara*. A few people obliged but many others turned down his request. They, in fact, taunted him for having the temerity to hold a *Bhandara* without having the wherewithal for organising it. As the day of the *Bhandara* drew near and Shridhar realised that he was finding it extremely difficult to organise the provisions that would be needed for feeding the huge number of people he had invited, he began to spend sleepless nights. His distress reached such proportions that he stopped taking the cattle for grazing on the mountain. He became sick with worry and found it difficult to concentrate even on his prayers and meditation.

Finally, the day fixed for the *Bhandara* arrived. Shridhar had not slept a wink the night before. He had, in fact, spent the entire night wrestling with the problem of how to feed his guests with the few provisions that he had been able to collect. However, when he was unable to come up with a satisfactory solution till the morning, he resigned himself to his fate and got up to face the day. After his ablutions, he collected the various things that would be required for the *Puja* that would precede the *Bhandara* and sat down for the *puja* outside his hut. By midday his guests started arriving. Finding him deeply involved in the *puja*, they began to make themselves comfortable wherever they could find place and began chatting with each other. When the *puja* was over Shridhar looked around and saw the huge number of guests who had arrived. He greeted them respectfully and was wondering how to tell his guests that he could not feed them when he saw Vaishnavi coming out of his hut. She walked up to him and told him softly that the food was ready and that he should request his guests to come into the hut and partake the meal. Shridhar looked at her disbelievingly but she caught him by his hand and gently pushed him towards his guests. Reluctantly, Shridhar walked up to his guests and requested them to go into the hut and eat the food that had been cooked. Since the hut was very small, a few people got up and went in. However, Shridhar found that there was still some space inside and so he requested a few more people to come in. This continued till all the guests had miraculously filled into that small hut. Then Vaishnavi put plates and cups made of leaves called *Pattal* and *Dona*, before each guest and began to serve them from a container she was holding in her hand. Each guest was served his favourite dishes and they ate till they were replete. Shridhar was in a daze. He could not believe his eyes when he saw all the guests eating to their heart's fill while he had had no food cooked. After the guests had eaten they took their leave and departed. Even though Shridhar was relieved that the *Bhandara* had been a success and his self respect was still intact, he could not help wondering that what had happened in his hut that day was possible only with divine intervention. So, he decided to get to the bottom of the matter by asking young Vaishnavi for an explanation for the

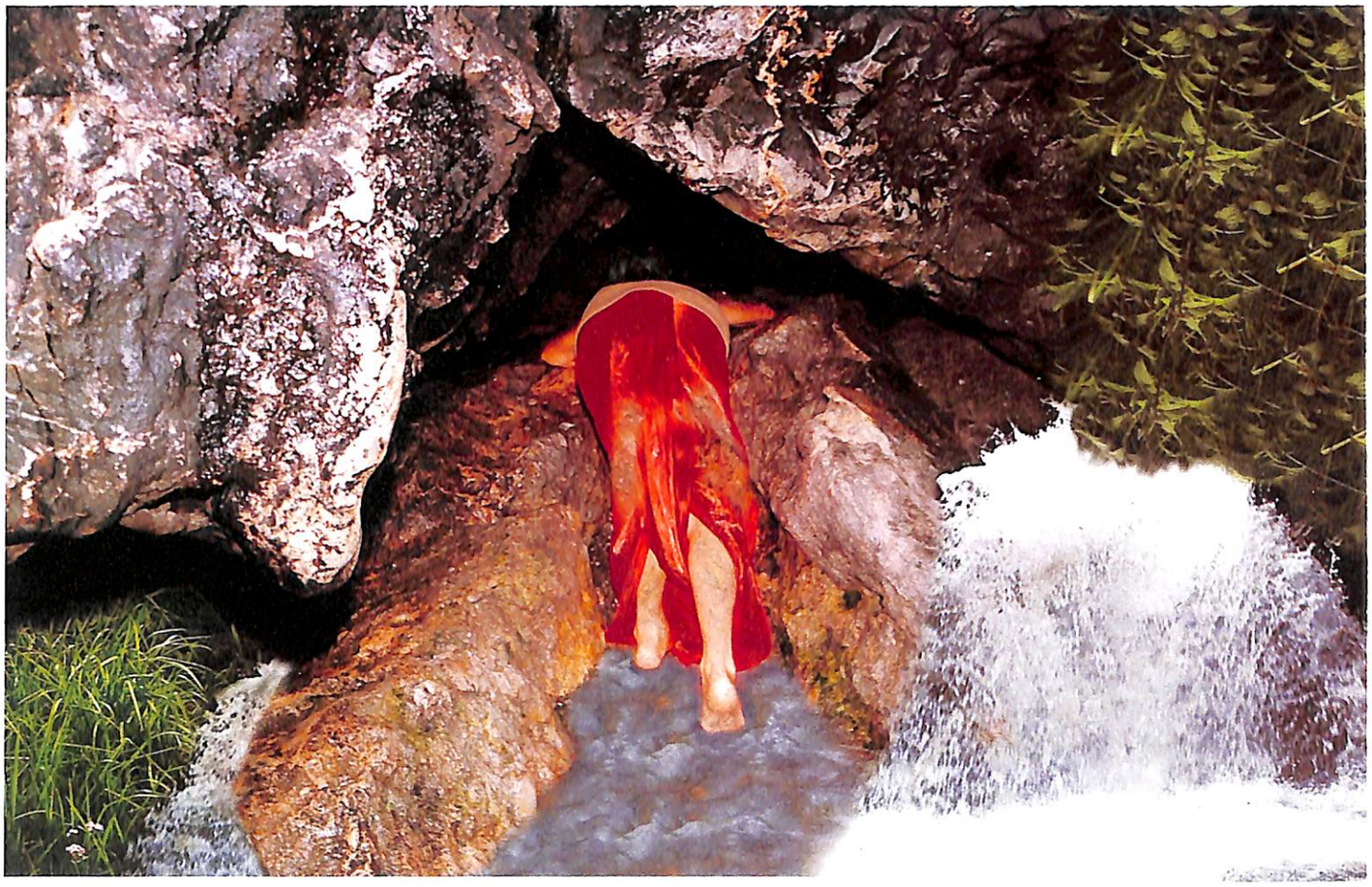
Trikuta Mountain under Mist

mysterious developments of the day. He called out to her. There was no reply. He called out again and again but with the same result. Vaishnavi was no where to be seen. Suddenly a feeling of emptiness engulfed him. He felt as if something very precious had been taken away from him. A burning desire to see Vaishnavi again seized him. So, he hurried up the mountain to where he usually took the cattle for grazing and began to look for Vaishnavi there, but to no avail. She just could not be found. As the hours ticked by his desire for meeting Vaishnavi began to grow more intense and he began searching for her frantically. High and low he looked for her, but in vain. Night fell and he had still not found her. He resolved to spend the night on the mountain so that he could start searching for her as soon as the next day broke.

He spent many days and nights on the mountain looking for Vaishnavi, but he could not find any trace of her. One day, while he was standing in the Pai nallah on the Trikuta mountain he happened to look up. He thought he glimpsed a person in red clothes standing on a ledge on the cliff. The ledge seemed to be adjacent to a place from where water was cascading down. He decided to investigate. He made his way with great difficulty up the cliff but found only some foliage and a small stream of water flowing out of the foliage. There was no sign of Vaishnavi. He went closer and peered behind the bushes and found an opening in the cliff face. It was a cave. He crawled into it and landed with a thump in cold, shallow water. He was winded so he lay there trying to get his breath back and adjust his eyes to the gloom inside. After some time he began to discern indistinct shapes and protruding rocks. He got up and slowly began to feel his way deeper into the cave. The cave seemed to turn this way and that as he continued to wade ahead in the water. As he went deeper into the cave it became darker and darker till he could see nothing. However, he continued to grope his way and move ahead. Then he sensed that the cave seemed to be ascending because the water level began to fall. After some time his feet were on dry ground. He sat down. Suddenly, the frustration of not having succeeded in searching out Vaishnavi and the desolation he felt at having been separated from her overwhelmed him. A sob welled up from deep inside him and tore out of his mouth. This was followed by another and then another. And then he was weeping in anguish with body racking sobs. While he wept he prayed to *Shakti* to help him locate Vaishnavi. Suddenly, the cave was bathed in ethereal light. The light shone upon him gently. Soon he felt as if the light had entered his very core. He was calmed. And then he had the vision. He saw Vaishnavi smiling at him through the light.Suddenly she was transformed into a celestial being of transcending beauty with eight arms and hands who was sitting astride a lion. In her hands she held different weapons and auspicious objects. In a mellifluous voice She told Shridhar that She was indeed *Shakti* in Her incarnation of Vaishnavi and resided in this cave in petrified rock-form. She added that this cave on the Trikuta mountain was a unique cave as it was only here that She was

manifested in Her three forms of MAHA KALI, MAHA LAKSHMI and MAHA SARASWATI. Divine rays emanated from each form and coalesced to radiate beneficent blessings upon all creatures who resided in the surrounding areas. She commanded him to worship Her in the cave every day. Thereafter, the vision ended. Gradually the light faded and the cave was once again plunged into darkness. However, Shridhar's heart was full of light. He had been blessed by his *Aradhya Dev*. He could wish for nothing more. Slowly he came out of the cave and wended his way down the mountain to his hut in Hansali. Whoever saw him remarked wonderingly at the glorious look of joy that seemed to suffuse not only his face but his very being.

Henceforth, every morning, before dawn broke, Shridhar would make his way to the cave to worship the Goddess Vaishnavi. Thereafter, he returned home to perform his daily chores. His daily routine of going to the Holy cave to worship the Goddess was not affected by the quirks of weather or the changes in the seasons. Whatever the weather, every morning would find him at the Holy cave. Soon this came to be remarked upon. Most of the people did not believe his explanation that he went every morning to worship Goddess Vaishnavi in Her abode in a Cave on the mountain. They reasoned that he could as easily worship the Goddess in his hut like the others in the village did. In fact, they further argued, he had been doing so all his life till he suddenly started disappearing



Shridhar entering the cave

every morning. Gradually word spread in the surrounding areas that "Shridhar disappears for a few hours every morning."

Trikuta mountain is located in the *Kandi* belt of Jammu region and is a dry zone. Not only is water scarce but the soil is rocky and infertile too. For this reason, the people in the area have traditionally been poor. During those days, legend says, the area was inhabited primarily by *Drora Thakkars, Maniotra Thakkars, Khas Thakkars and Samnotra Brahmans*. All of them were agriculturists and they eked out a precarious living from the soil. The mysterious conduct of Shridhar came in for considerable comment and soon a rumour spread that Shridhar had chanced upon a treasure horde and he went to the mountain every day to count it. Very quickly the story was embellished by imaginary accounts of his change in life style and his luxurious ways. Hardly any one bothered to cross check and ascertain whether this was true. When the entire area was all agog with such rumours, the leaders of the four communities met in private to discuss the matter. They agreed that Shridhar had chanced upon some kind of a treasure. That is why he used to walk around looking so happy. They also agreed that Shridhar should have shared his good fortune with the others considering the fact that the people in the area were generally poor and could do with a little financial help. They further agreed that Shridhar had erred grievously in not reporting his find to the leaders and surrendering a part of the booty to them. Therefore, they resolved that a few sturdy young men should waylay Shridhar and force him to show them the treasure. They also agreed that whatever was found should be shared equally by the four communities.

A group of young men were selected and assigned the task of waylaying Shridhar. Within the next couple of days these young men had positioned themselves at a place which fell on the route that Shridhar was known to usually adopt when he went up the mountain.

Shridhar was blissfully unaware of the turbulence that he had caused in the area by his mysterious early morning sojourns. As it was, he had begun to live in a spiritual world of his own after the vision and although he still met others socially and treated every one correctly, he yet gave the impression of being always a little aloof, a little detached. His neighbours interpreted it as an air of superiority that they felt had crept into his behaviour after he had found his treasure. Some envied his good fortune, others were intensely jealous.

As was his wont, this morning too Shridhar left his hut in the very early hours of the day, much before day break, and made his way up the mountain. There was a prayer in his heart, a *Jaikara* on his lips and a skip in his step as he climbed the mountain purposefully. He neither suspected nor expected that he would be attacked by any one. After all they could steal nothing from him! So, he was shocked out of his wits when he suddenly found himself surrounded by some people who seemed

intent on beating him senseless. He could not offer any resistance and fell down bleeding. His tormentors continued to kick and pummel him. They stopped only when he began to moan in agony and his breathing began to come in tortured gasps. Then they roughly asked him to show them where the treasure he had discovered was hidden. Shridhar was unable to comprehend what his tormentors wanted from him and he said as much. This led to another beating. When Shridhar finally understood what these people wanted from him he was thunderstruck. Even in his wildest dreams he could have never imagined that his early morning visits to the Holy cave would be interpreted by people as secret visits to a vast treasure that he had discovered. When he tried to tell the young men that they were mistaken they glowered at him and threatened to beat him some more. Finally, in sheer desperation Shridhar decided to take them to the Holy Cave. So, with Shridhar leading the way the party marched towards the cave. Enroute, Shridhar picked up a few small branches of Chir (Pine) trees which he explained to the young people, he would light up and use as torches when they entered the dark cave. These torches are known in local parlance as *Deenee* and are frequently used even now by village folk whenever they have to move about in the night through forested or uninhabited areas.

After a few hours of steady climbing and descending the party reached the mouth of the Holy Cave. Shridhar set light to the Chir branches and distributed them amongst the people in the group. Then he entered the cave first and the others followed him. The cold water, the light of the torches bouncing off some walls of the cave and casting deep shadows on others, the gentle sound of the splashing water and the soft chanting of prayers by Shridhar, all combined to create a mysterious effect and subdued the belligerence of the young men. Shridhar led the way to the sanctum sanctorum and showed them the Holy Pindies. He then narrated to them the story of young Vaishnavi and the Vision he had. All present were impressed and after paying obeisance they came out of the cave and commenced their return journey. After they had been walking for some time, the impact of the *Darshan* and the atmosphere in the Holy cave began to wear off. One of the young men then remembered that the leaders of the four groups would be quite annoyed if they returned empty handed. He said as much. The others mulled over it and agreed that it would indeed be so. They thought about the problem and then one of them suggested that since the place was holy, news about its holiness should be spread in the neighboring villages. As a result people would start visiting the Holy Shrine for worship. When they did so they were bound to make some offerings. These could be shared by the various groups. The suggestion was found acceptable and the group returned to their respective homes to report about the matter. The next day the leaders of the four groups reassembled and discussed the report received by them. They were all suitably impressed by the description of the aura of the *Pindies* and agreed that the place

was indeed holy and needed to be popularised. They also agreed that the offerings made by the devout at the Shrine should be shared equally among all of them. Broadly, they agreed that each group should be allotted one day by rotation for collecting the offerings. Thus the turn of each group would come on every fifth day and that group would be entitled to carry away the offerings of that day. Details of who among which group would go to collect the offerings on a particular day were left to be sorted out by the elders of each group. In local language the word for a turn is *Bari*. Thus on every fifth day the turn or *Bari* of one group would come to collect the offerings. This was the genesis of the *Baridari* system of later times. The elders also agreed that no part of the offerings should be given to Shridhar because, they hastened to explain to each other, he was only interested in his spiritual advancement and not material well being. Besides,devout *Brahmans* were otherwise also supposed to pursue the ideal of *Daridra Narayan*, they told each other. And they did not wish to incur the *Paap* of diverting him from attaining this goal by placing materialistic temptation in his path. Thus, Shridhar was effectively kept out of the arrangement of sharing the offerings. However, Shridhar was neither interested in these arrangements nor cared to know about them. He continued to worship the Goddess everyday in the cave. His routine did not alter even after he got married. Before he died, he enjoined upon his children to continue to worship the Goddess every day in the same fashion.

Shridhar's progeny have been worshipping the Goddess in the Holy cave since those hoary days!

Deep

THE HOLY CAVE

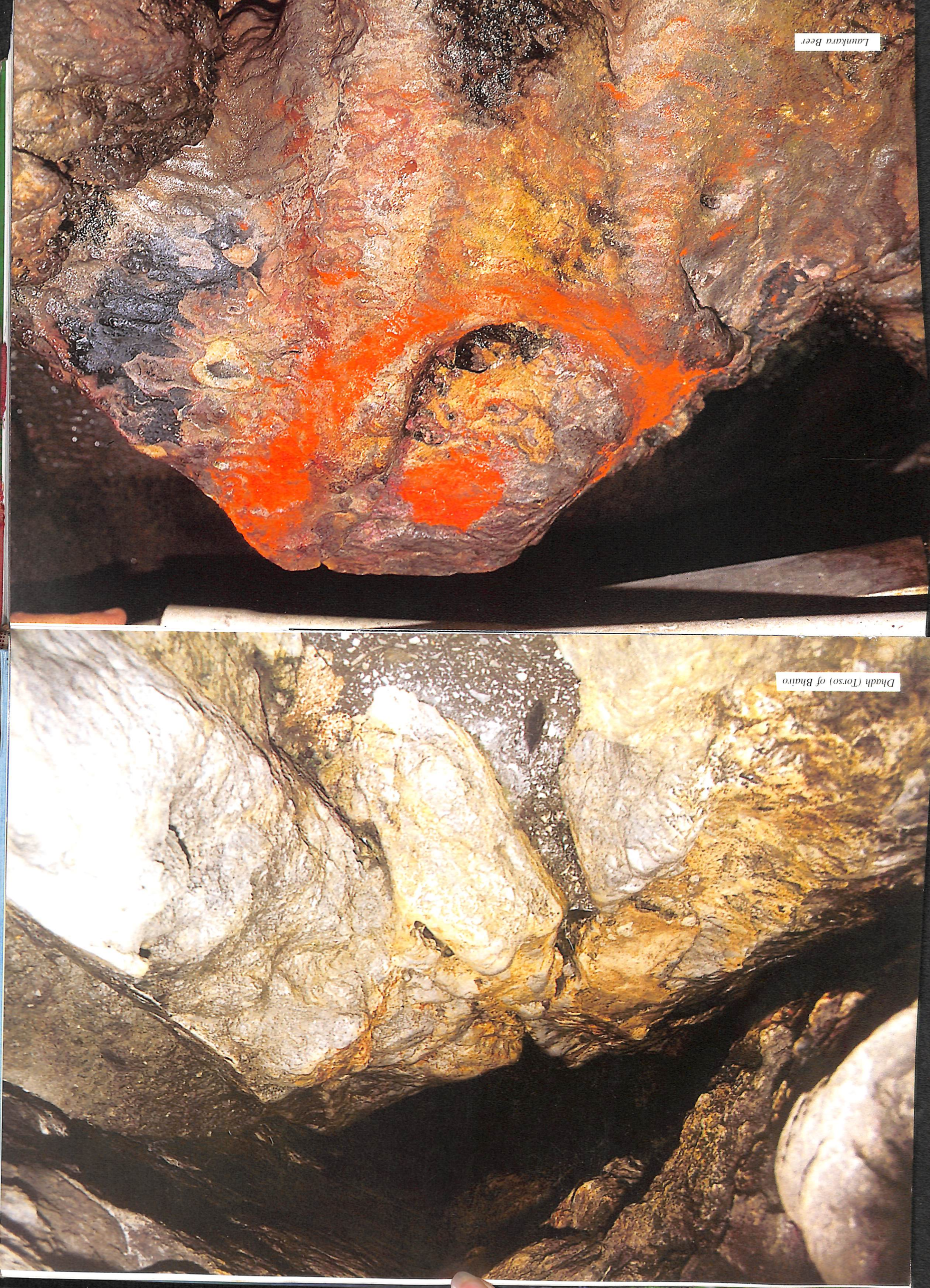
Entry into the holy cave

The total length of the holy Cave is about ninety eight feet. The symbols of a large number of Gods and Goddesses of the Hindu pantheon can be seen in the holy Cave. At the mouth of the original tunnel to the holy Cave can be seen the symbol of *Vakra Tunda Ganesha*

on the left hand side of the rock face. Adjacent to the symbol of Lord Ganesha can be seen the symbols of *Surya Dev* and *Chandra Dev*. When you crawl into the holy Cave through the natural tunnel you cross over the *Dhadh* of Bhairo Nath who was beheaded by the Goddess at the entry point to the holy Cave. The *Dhadh* is fourteen feet long. After this can be seen the symbol of Lord Hanuman called *Launkra Beer*. The pilgrims have to wade through water beyond the *Launkra Beer* point. Twenty three feet beyond *Launkra Beer*, on the left upper hand side, the roof of the cave flares out and the weight of this over hang appears to be resting on the innumerable heads of *Shesh Nag*. Immediately below Shesh Nag can be seen the *Havan Kund* of Mata. Adjacent to it can be seen the symbols of *Shankh, Chakra, Gada* and *Padam*. Higher up , almost touching the ceiling of the cave are the symbols of the *five Pandavas*, the *Sapt Rishi*, the *Than* of the divine cow, *Kamdhenu, Brahma* and *Vishnu* and *Shiv* and *Parvati*. Three feet further ahead, on an elevation some what lower than *Shiv and Parvati*, can be seen the *Khamba* that was gripped by the legendary worshipper Prahlad. Diagonally below this, at the water level can be seen the *Yantra* with innumerable mystical signs and symbols inscribed on it. Twenty two feet beyond this point is located the *Sher Ka Panja* symbolising the lion which is the mount of Mata Vaishno Devi Ji. The distance from the entry point to the *Sher Ka Panja* is fifty nine feet. Thirteen feet beyond this, immediately above the head of the worshipper, is located the symbol of the Primary Hood of *Shesh Nag* which appears to be bearing the weight of the roof of the Cave at this point. The length of the cave up to the primary hood of *Shesh Nag* is seventy two feet. Six feet further ahead, on the left hand side, are the symbols of *Shankar and Gouri*. Thirteen feet beyond the symbols of *Shankar* and *Gouri* are located the holiest of the holy *Pindies* of "Mata Maha Kali Ji", "Mata Maha Lakshmi Vaishno Devi Ji," and "Mata Maha Saraswati Ji". The length of the Cave up to this point is ninety one feet. To the right of the holy Pindies on the upper side we can once again identify the symbols of *Ganesh, Surya Dev, Chandra Dev* and Goddess *Annapurna*. Slightly behind the holy Pindies , on the right hand side can be seen the symbol of the seated *Sinh Raj*. A little ahead of it can be seen the full hand of the Goddess raised in the *Vard Hast* mode granting boons to the world. Immediately opposite the Holy Pindies is the natural symbol of Lord *Pashupati Nath* .

Water gushes out of the base of the holy Pindies and flows out of the holy Cave. It is known as *Charan Ganga* and this water is collected in small containers by the devotees and taken home . The same water is also channelised to the bathing ghat and the devotees take a bath in this water before they join the queue for *Darshan* of the holy *Pindies*.

Ganesh (Outside the cave)



Launkara Beer

Dhadh (Torso) of Bhairo

Havan Kund

Shesh Nag (with innumerable heads)

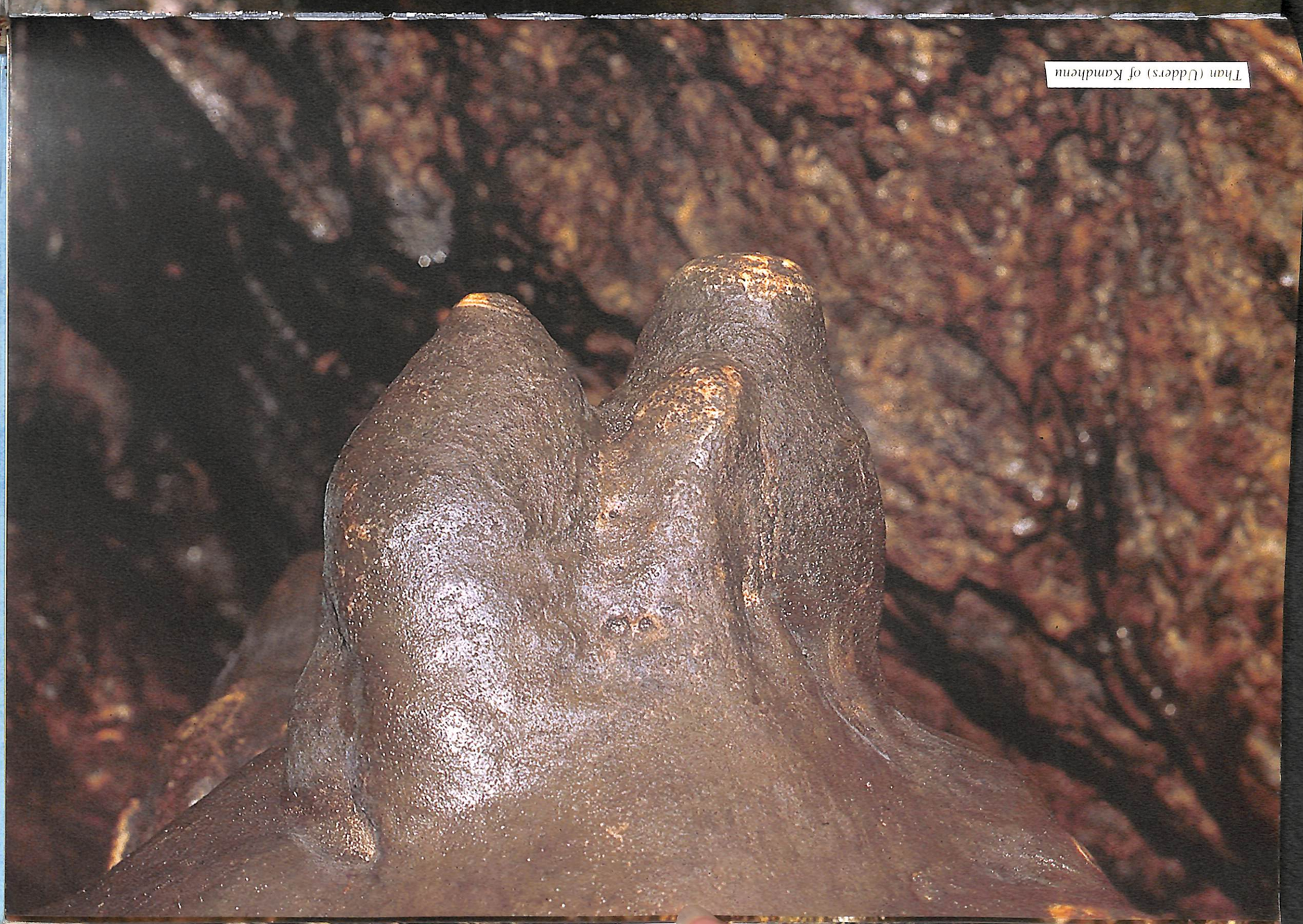
Chakra
Shankh

Gada

Padam

Sapt Rishi
Five Pandavas

Brahma and Vishnu



Than (Udders) of Kamdhenu

Shiv and Parvati

Khamba (Pillar)

Sher-ka-Pamja (the lion's claw)

Yantra

Shankar and Gauri

Primary hood of Shesh Nag

Annapurna

Sink Raj

Vard Hast of the Goddess

Pashupati Nath

Charan Ganga (Gentle Water)

THE ROUTE TO THE HOLY CAVE

Katra at Night

Sadhu in Ban Ganga

The holy cave lies nestled in the folds of the mighty Trikuta mountain fifty kilometers from Jammu, the winter capital of the State of Jammu and Kashmir in India. Jammu is connected with the rest of the country by rail, road and air. From Jammu one has to travel by road up to Katra which is the base camp for the pilgrimage to the holy Shrine.

From Katra onwards the pilgrim has to trek on foot for a distance of twelve kilometers to reach the holy Shrine. Enroute the pilgrim crosses Banganga, Charan Paduka, Adhkwari and Sanji Chhat before he reaches the holy cave.

Banganga is a small perennial stream and is considered holy by the pilgrims. According to the legend, this stream owes its existence to the Goddess. It is believed that while crossing this ravine on her way to the holy cave on the mountain, the langoors accompanying the Goddess felt thirsty. However, there was no sign of water any where. Therefore, the Goddess shot an arrow in to the ground. The arrow went deep in to the bowels of the earth and smashed its way to an aquifer of crystal clear water which jetted out of the earth through the path bored by the arrow. The langoors accompanying the Goddess quenched their thirst. The Goddess also drank some water and the party proceeded ahead. This stream of water has been flowing continuously since then. It is known as Banganga which is a combination of two words—BAN and GANGA. Ban means an arrow and commemorates the legend that the stream gushed out after the earth had been struck by an arrow shot by the Goddess. The word Ganga denotes the purity and the holiness of the water in the stream.

Charan Paduka is a small promontory about one and a half kilometers beyond Banganga. According to the legend the Goddess halted here briefly to catch Her breath and to see if She was being pursued by Bhairo Nath. While She stood here Her feet were imprinted on the rock on which She was standing.

Adhkwari is a corruption of the word *ADI KWARI* which means the eternal virgin and epitomises the fact that Mata Vaishno Devi Ji is the eternal virgin. Adhkwari is the name of the place where the Goddess performed Tapasya for nine months before She finally left for Bhawan and the holy cave. Mata performed her Tapasya at Adhkwari in a very narow cave which is known as *GARABH JOON*. According to the legend, when Mata reached Adhkwari She discovered a narrow cave which was hidden by a dense over growth of bushes and shrubs. She thought it was an excellent place for performing Tapasya because the likelihood of its being discovered by Bhairo Nath was quite remote . Therefore, She entered the cave and went into deep meditation. She remained in this state of meditation for nine long months. Meanwhile, Bhairo Nath who was looking for Her with ferocious doggedness finally discovered the cave and entered it. When Mata realised that Bhairo Nath had not only discovered the cave but also entered it, She smashed another way out of the cave

Adh kwari at Night

with Her Trishul and swiftly left for the holy cave at Bhawan. Since Mata remained in this cave for nine months and also because of the fact that this cave is extremely narrow and very dificult to crawl through it is equated with the womb of the mother through which every child wriggles out at the time of its birth. Therefore, the cave is called Garabh Joon. The word *GARABH* means the womb in which a child is conceived and the word Joon is a corruption of the word *YONI* or the female genetalia through which a child comes out while taking birth. The Hindus believe that in its journey of transmigration, the soul has to take birth eighty four lakh times or pass through eighty four lakh yonis, before it becomes eligible to take birth as a human being. MOKSHA can be achieved by the soul only in its human form. If, however, a human being commits a heinous sin then the soul again falls to the bottom of the evolutionary ladder and must once again embark on that long journey of eighty four lakh births before it can once again assume the form of a human being. The belief is that if a person crawls through Garabh Joon he literally washes away all his past sins and thus escapes the horrifying prospect of falling to the bottom of the evolutionary ladder and losing the chance of attaining Moksha in this life.

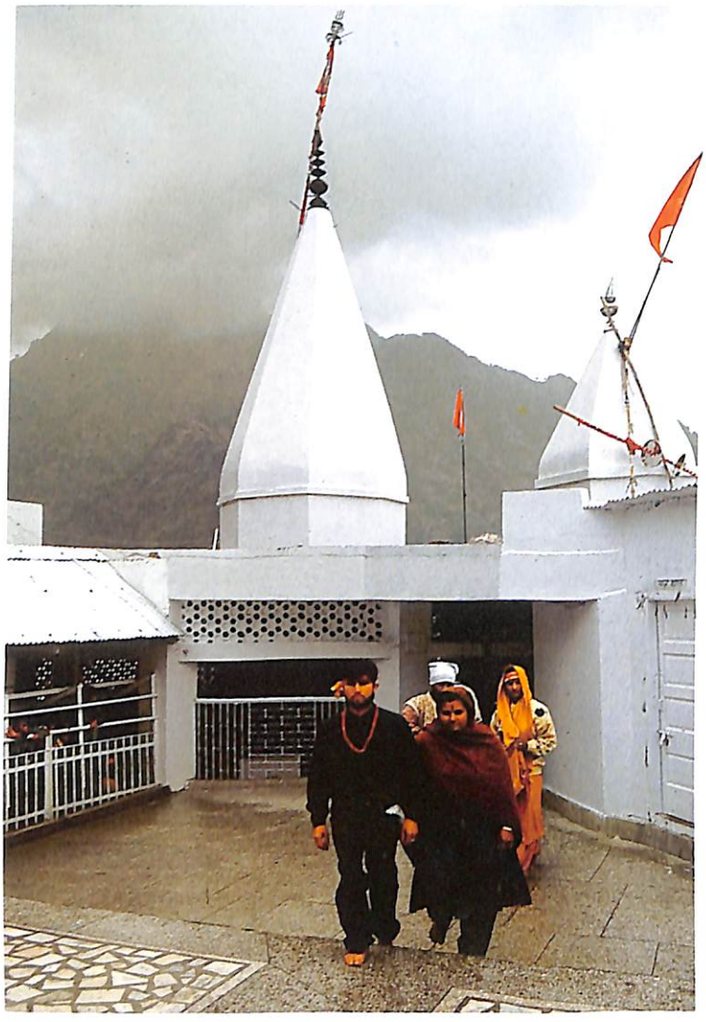
There is no religious connotation attached with Sanji Chhat. It is relevant only due to the fact that the uphill journey to the holy Shrine ceases at Sanji Chhat and the track evens out there after. On way to Sanji Chhat, the pilgrim has to negotiate the tough climb of HATHI MATHA which is so named because the climb in this stretch resembles in steepness the fore head of the elephant. The word *Hathi* means an elephant and the word *Matha* means the forehead.

Two and a half kilometers beyond Sanji Chhat is located the holy cave which contains the holiest of the holy PINDIS manifesting Mata in Her three forms of MAHA KALI, MAHA LAKSHMI VAISHNO and MAHA SARASWATI. Each form represents a particular attribute. Thus Maha Kali represents TAM GUNA, Maha Lakshmi Vaishno represents RAJ GUNA, and Maha Saraswati represents SATVA GUNA.

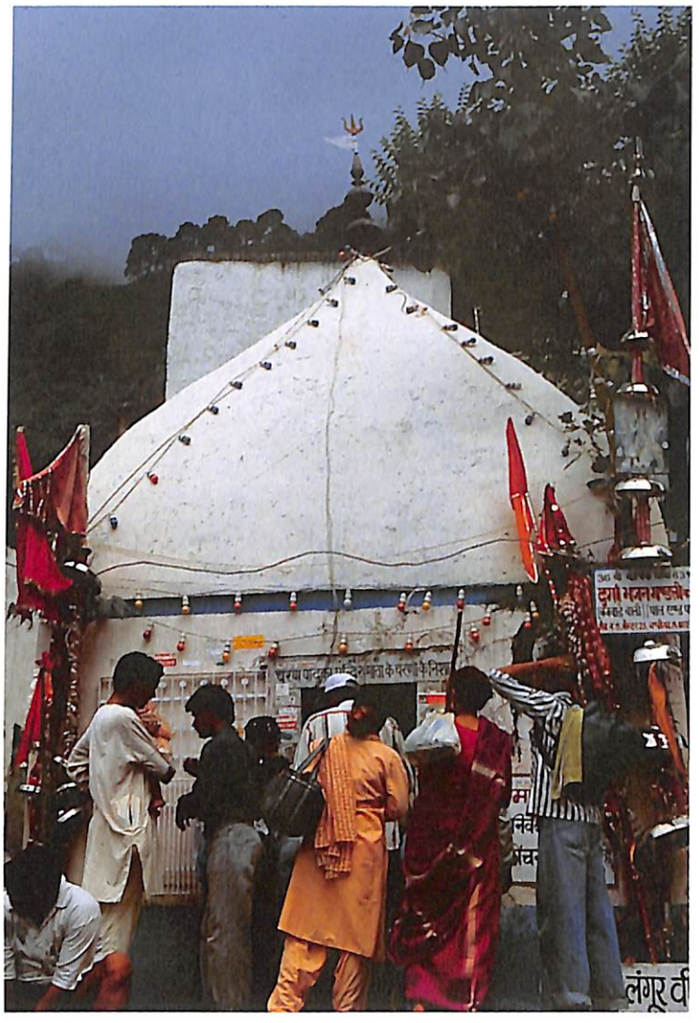
TAM stands for darkness or unholiness. In Her attribute of Maha Kali, Mata is constantly endeavouring to vanquish the forces of darkness and blesses Her devotees by giving them strength to never lose heart and constantly battle the forces of darkness till they prevail upon them.

RAJ stands for sustenance, prosperity and well being. In Her attribute of Maha Lakshmi Vaishno, Mata blesses Her devotees with wealth and prosperity and thus makes their life more comfortable and happy.

SATVA stands for purity and goodness. In Her attribute of Maha Saraswati, Mata blesses Her devotees with pure thoughts and a high intellect. This enables them to distinguish between good and bad, between righteousness and unrighteousness and helps them to adopt the correct path in life.



Adhkwari Temple



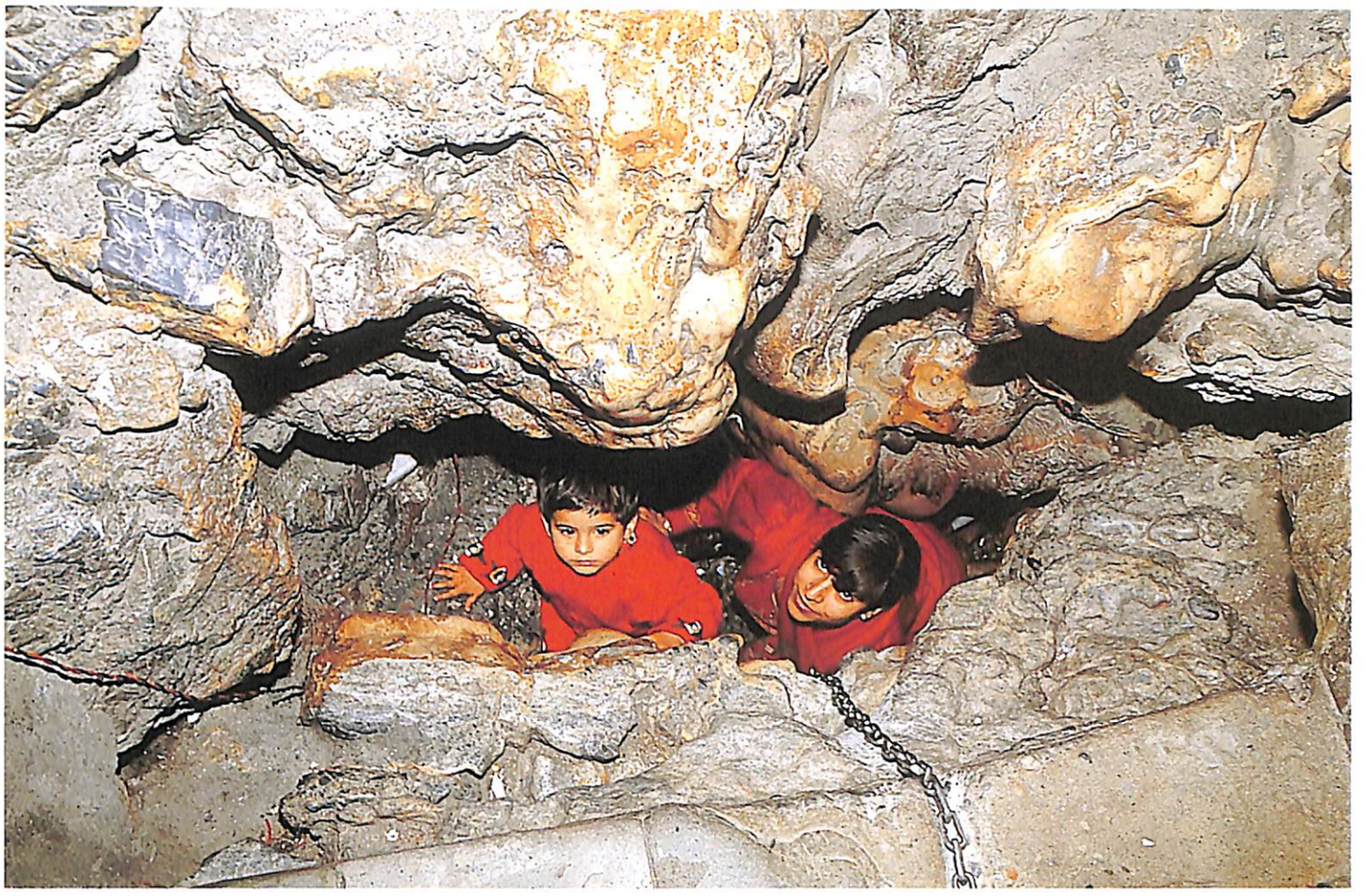
Charan Paduka Temple

Thus, very broadly speaking the three manifestations of the Goddess can be accepted to stand for the following attributes in man:-

MAHAKALI (TAM) STRENGTH
MAHALAKSHMI (RAJ) WEALTH
MAHASARASWATI (SATVA) INTELLECT

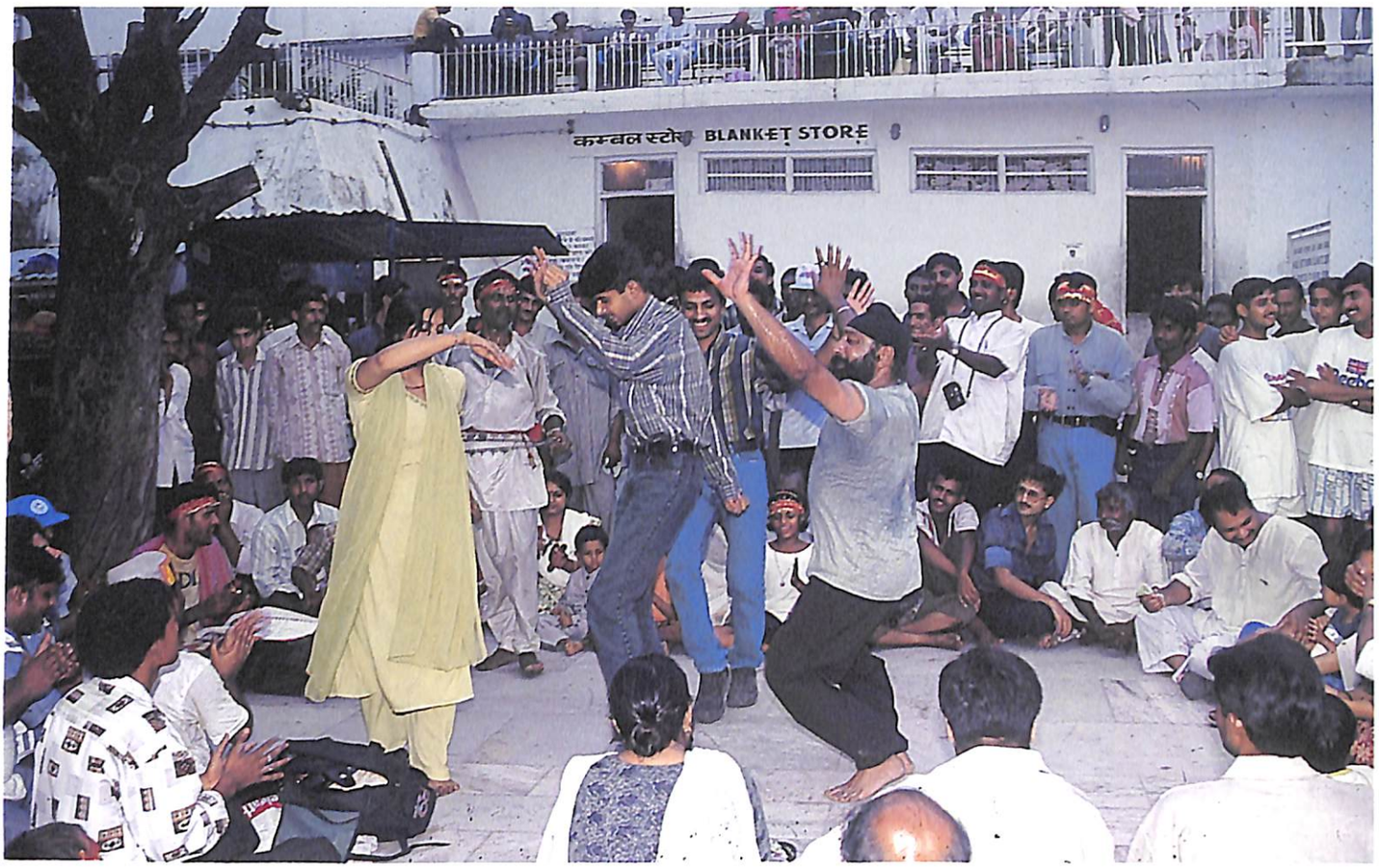
Each person on earth contains the attributes of Tam Guna, Raj Guna and Satva Guna in some degree or the other. His or Her behaviour is, therefore, conditioned by which attribute is predominant. However, to lead a full and meaningful life a balance has to be struck amongst the three. This balance is extremely difficult to achieve. It needs divine blessings. It is only at Vaishno Devi Ji that such blessings are possible simultaneously from a single source of SHAKTI. This is what makes the holy Shrine of MATA VAISHNO DEVI JI unique in the world.

Note : If these attributes are given in their proper, accepted order then they will read as Satva Guna, Raj Guna and Tam Guna. We have changed the order due to the fact that the holy Pindis are situated in this order and the Pindes are thus situated probably due to the fact that normal humans tend to display a greater degree of Tam Gun. From Tam Gun they progress to Raj Guna and after great effort a few of them achieve the attributes of Satva Guna.



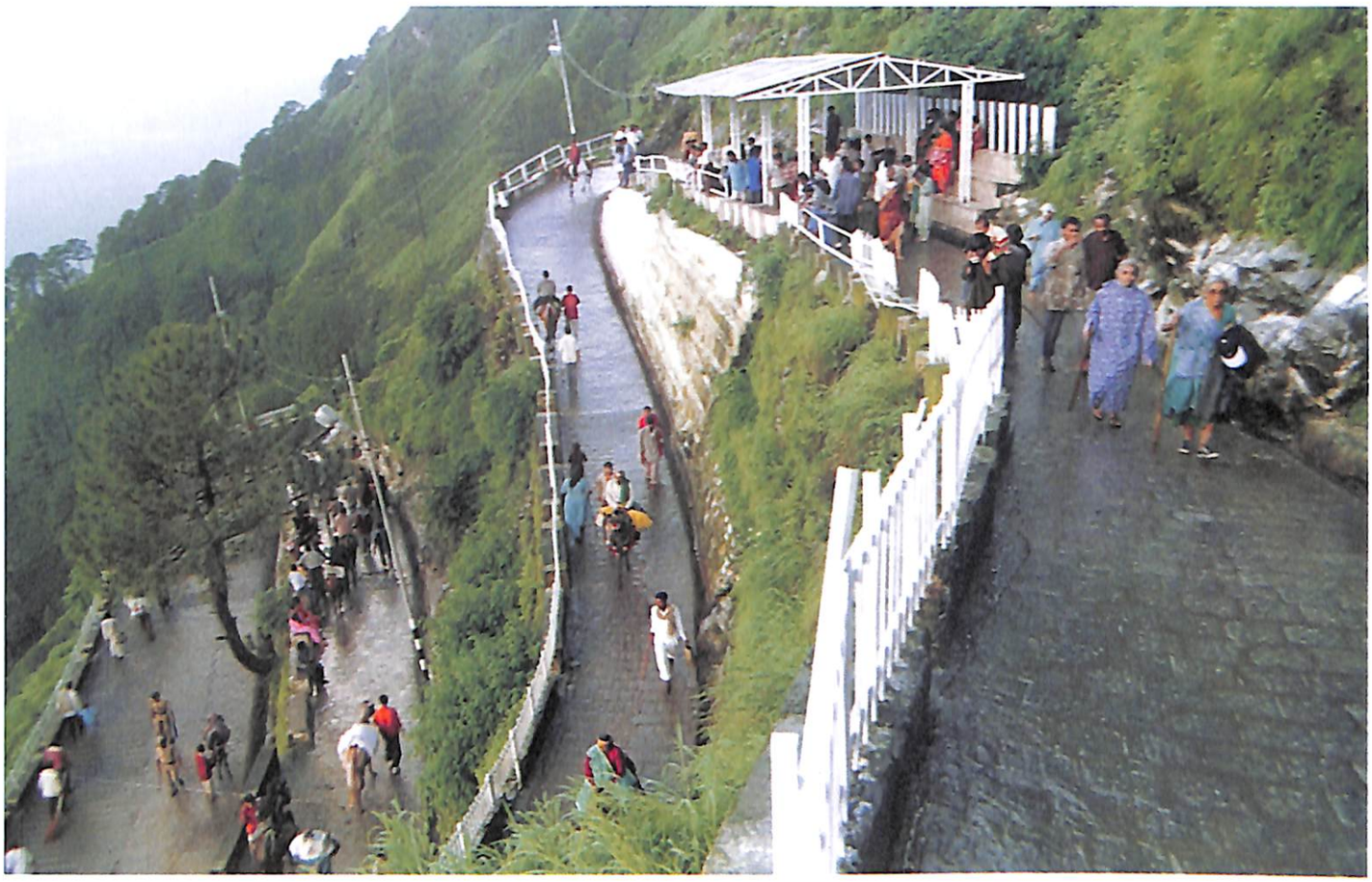
Garabh Joon Exit

People resting at Adh Kwari



People dancing in ecstacy at Adh Kwari

Blessing the world !



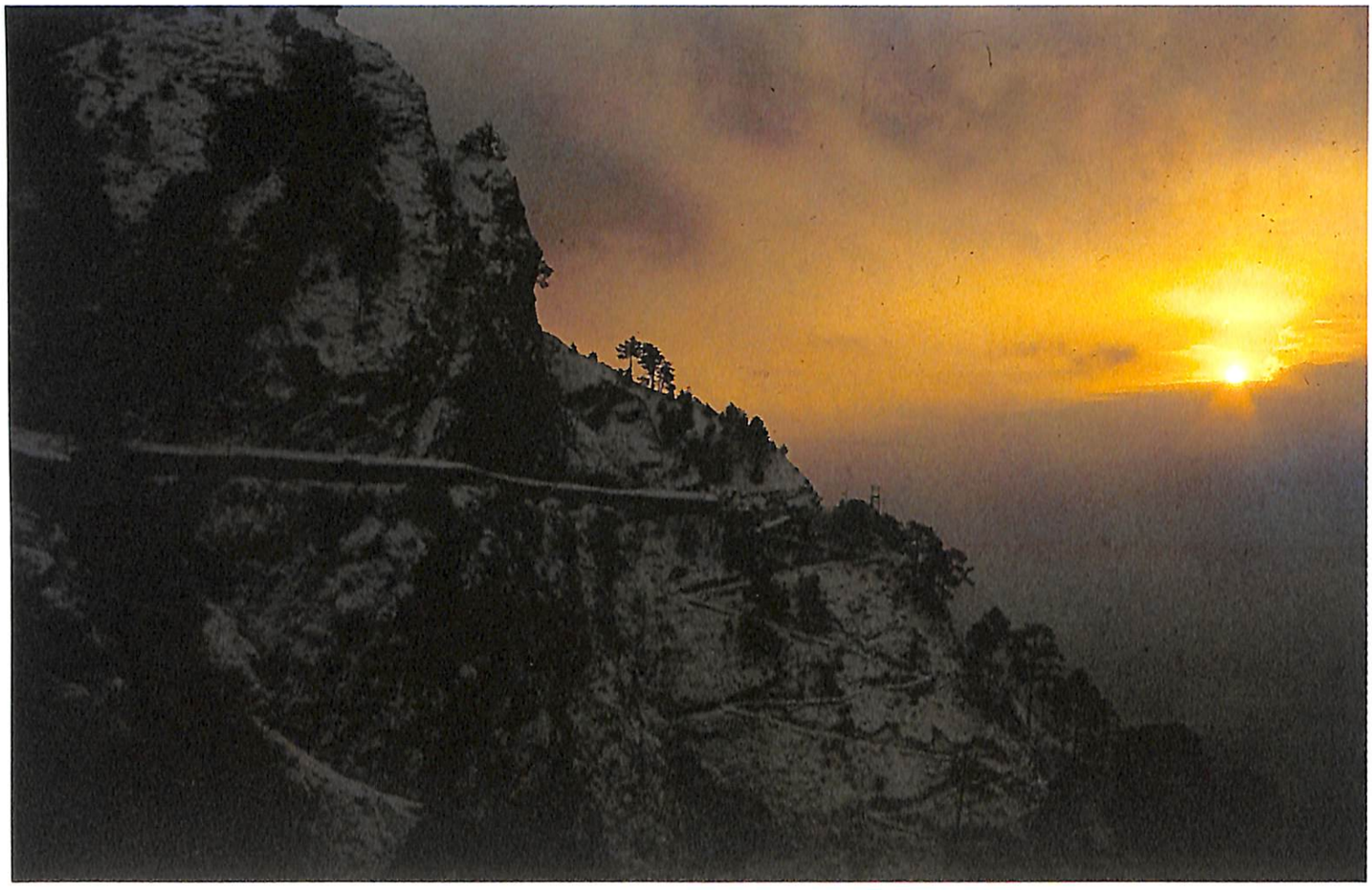
Enroute Sanji Chhat

A Child on a pony

Sanji Chhat at night

Sanji Chhat

The track under snow



A wintery evening

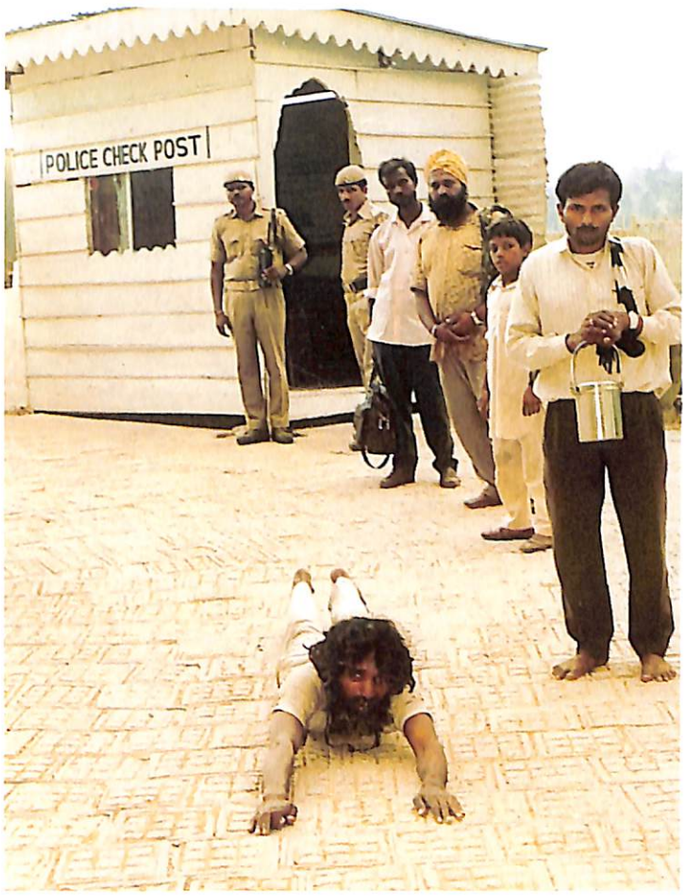
Walking bare feet through snow

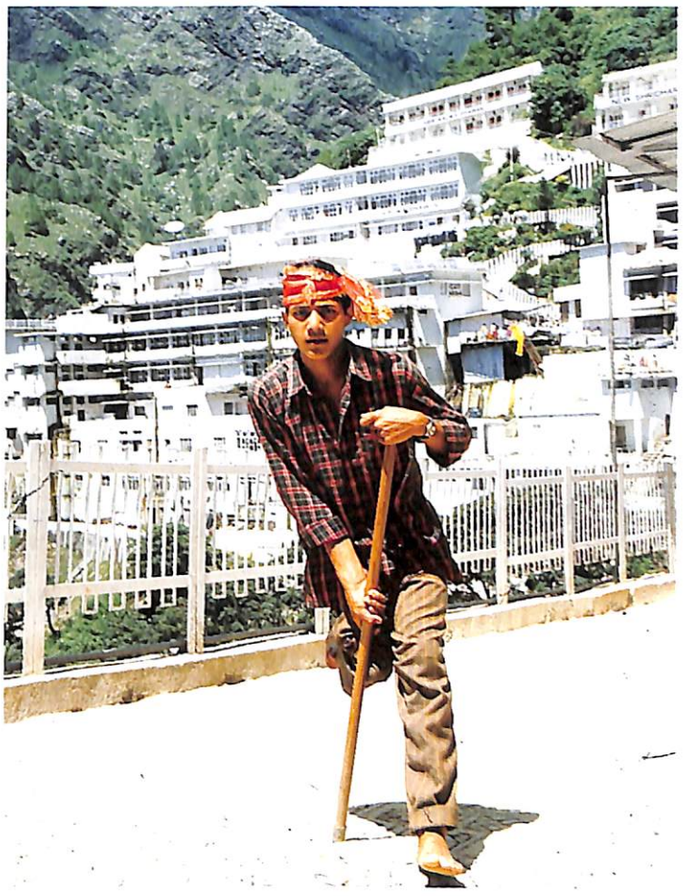
Determined little steps

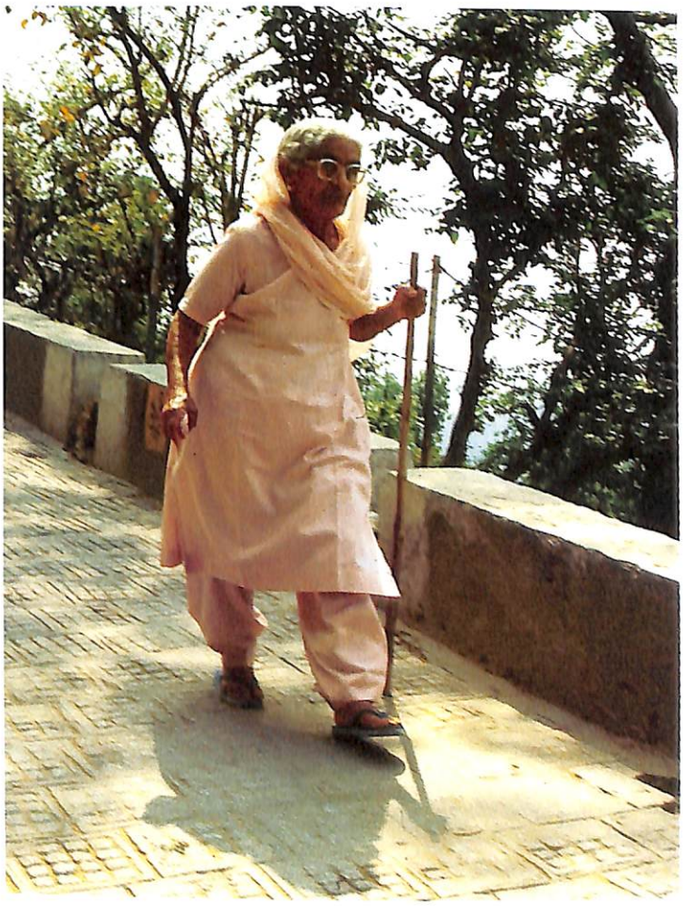
High Spirits

Contemplation

FAITH MOVES MOUNTAINS







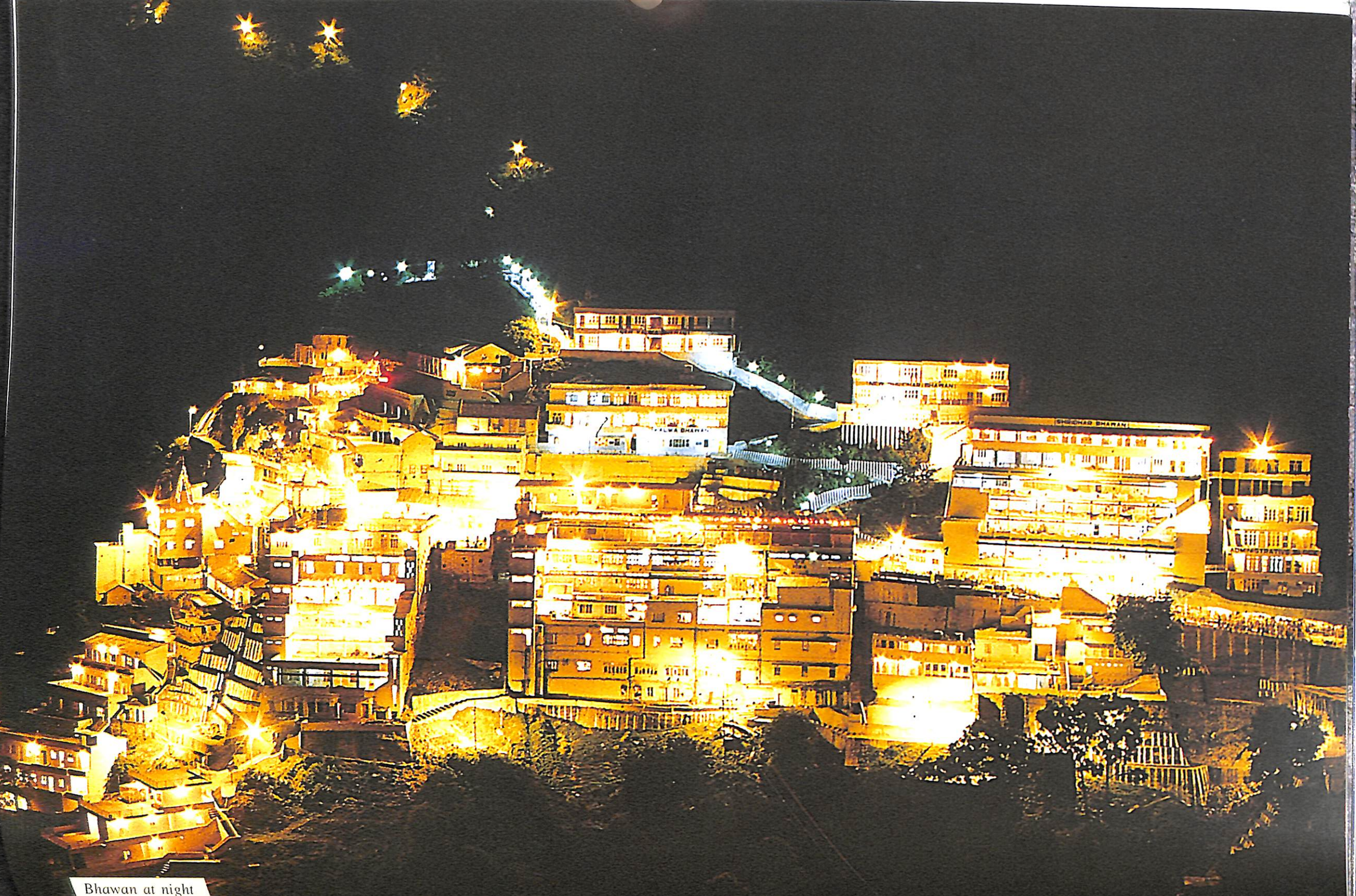
Minstrels singing ballads

'Khetri' for offering

भोजनालय
BHOJANALAYA
स्थापित
भोजनालय
SHRINE
BHOJANALAYA

'PET PUJA'

चित्र कूट
CHITRA KOOT



Bhawan at night

Bhawan under mist

Bhawan under snow

The Holy Pindies

Horizons beckon

AARTI

The Aarti of the Goddess is performed twice a day, once during the morning at sun rise and again during the evening at sun set. The holy cave is closed for pilgrims during the period the Aarti is being performed. It usually takes around two hours for the Aarti to be completed. Only the *Pujaris*, *Sahayaks* and an officer are permitted in the cave when the Aarti is being performed. The sequence of the various activities that are performed at Aarti is as under:-

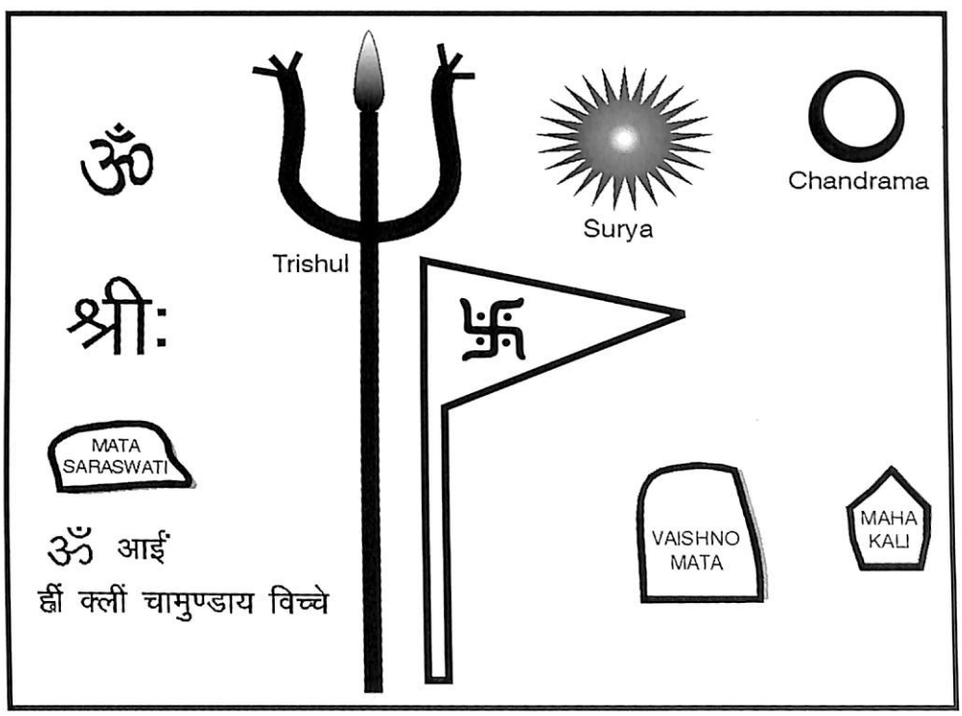
At the commencement of the Aarti the Pujaris utter aloud the 108 names of Durga. Then they perform *Atam Puja* for their own purification and apply *Tilak* on each other's forehead. This is followed by the chanting of mantras exhorting the Devas to give the Pujaris sound health. Thereafter, *Prithvi*, *Surya*, *Deep* and *Dhoop* are worshipped by the chanting of mantras. Once these activities are over, the Pujaris chant the *Pratigyaa Sankalp* where they vow to worship Mata Maha Kali, Maha Lakshmi Vaishno Mata and Mata Maha Saraswati. Then the clothes and the ornaments adorning the Holy Pindies are removed and the Goddess is bathed with water. Thereafter, the symbols of *Ganesh*, *Surya* and *Chandrama* are also bathed with water. The water that is used for bathing the holy Pindies is collected from the *Charan Ganga* which emanates from the base of the Pindies. The Pujaris bathe the holy Pindies to the accompaniment of the chanting of the mantras of *Swasti Vaachnan*.

After the holy Pindies have been bathed with water, they are bathed with the five *Amrits*. The first is milk, the second is curd or yogurt, the third is *ghee* or clarified butter, the fourth is honey and the fifth is sugar. As the bath with each *Amrit* is completed, the Pindies are again bathed with water. When the bathing with the individual Amrits is over, the holy Pindies are given one more bath, this time with *"Panchamrit"* or the five *Amrits* mixed together. Thereafter, they are again bathed with water.

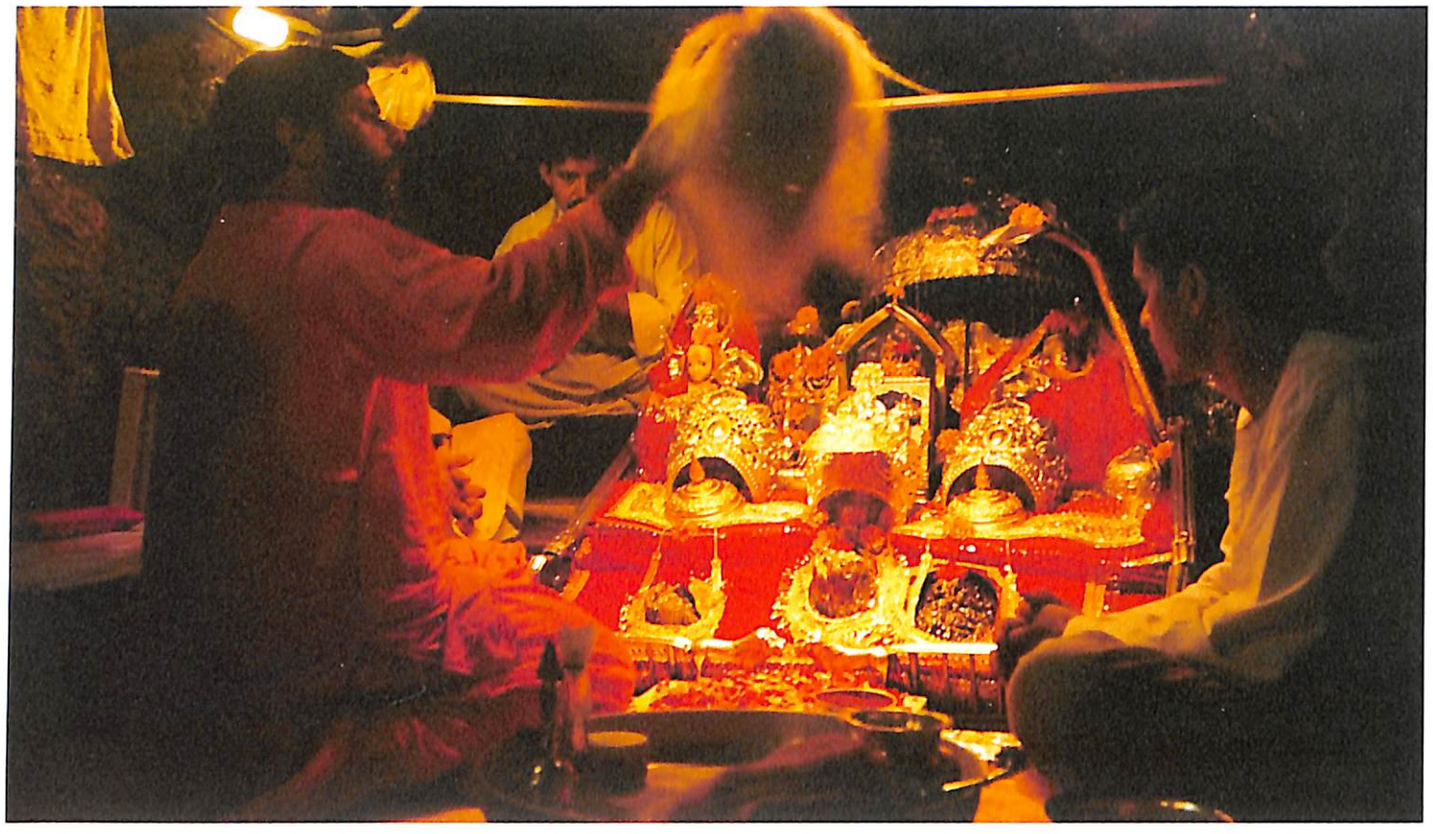
Each bath, whether with the individual Amrit or with the five Amrits mixed together, is given to the accompaniment of the chanting of the appropriate *mantras*.

After the holy Pindies have been bathed, the symbol of "Pashupatinath" is given a bath with Panchamrit. This is followed by a general cleaning of the area of the sanctum sanctorum. When this is over, One *Kalash* of water of the Charan Ganga is poured over each of the three holy Pindis for final *Shuddhi*. Then the holy Pindis and the area adjacent to them are dried with towels to the accompaniment of the mantras of *Ganpati Pujanam*. As soon as this is over the Pujaris chant the *Devyapradh Kshamapan Stotram* or the mantras seeking forgiveness for their sins and shortcomings from the Goddess. While this is going on the Pujaris make preparations for dressing up and adorning the holy Pindis.

The feature where the holy Pindis are located is presently covered with a sheet of gold which has only three openings, one each for Mata Maha Kali, Mata Maha Lakshmi Vaishno and Mata Maha Saraswati. Before commencing the ritual for adorning the holy Pindis the Pujaris draw some symbols with sandalwood paste and write some mantras on the sheet of gold. The following diagram will illustrates this activity.



After the mantras have been written and the symbols have been drawn on the sheet of gold the process of dressing up the holy Pindis and adorning them commences. A *Chunni* is placed below the Pindis in a horizontal fashion. A *sari* is similarly placed on top of it. Then a *Chola* is placed on the holy Pindis which covers the area



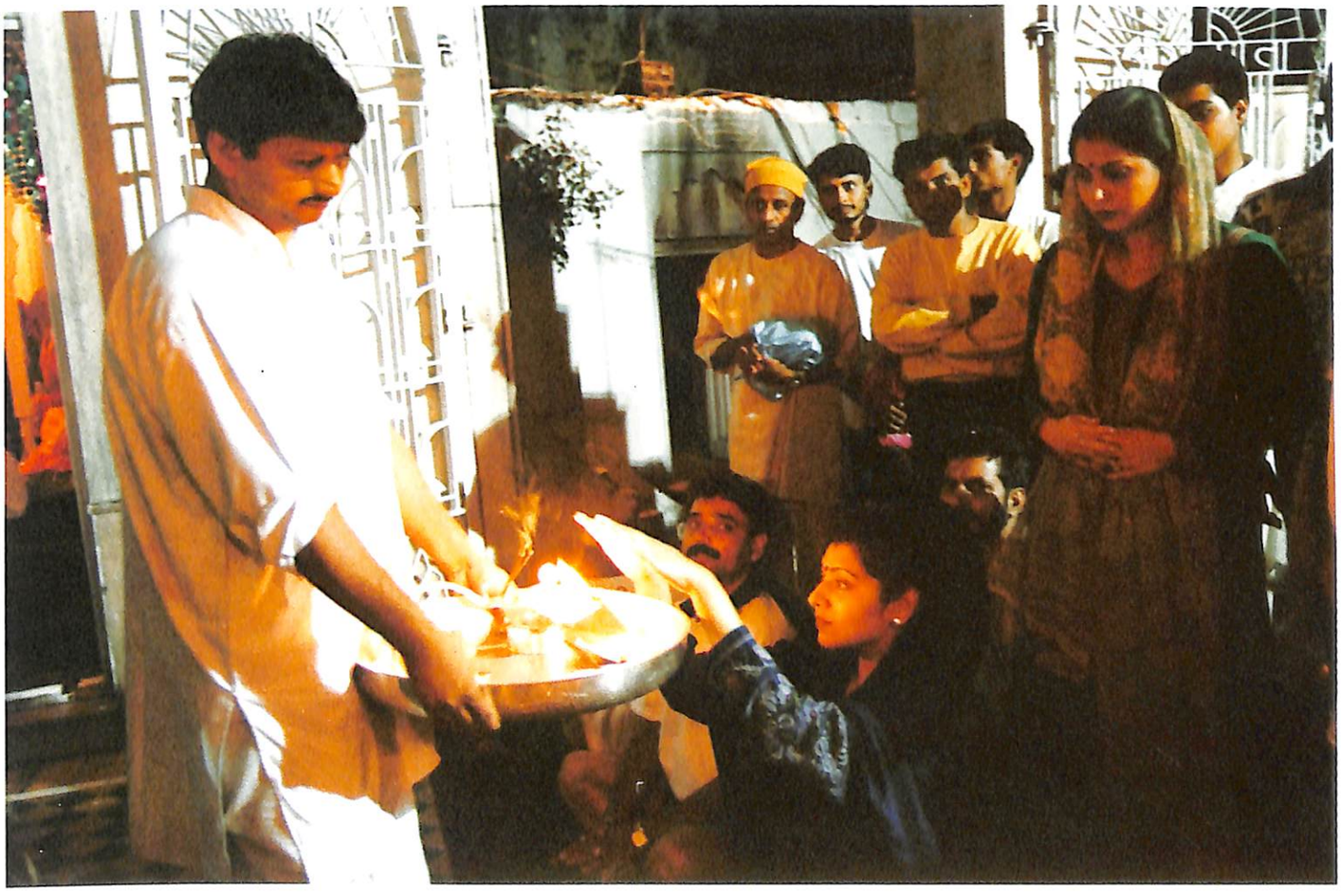
of the three Pindis leaving only three gaps, one for each of the holy Pindis. Then three chunnies are placed, one upon the other, along the area above the holy Pindis, again in an horizontal fashion. After this one Chola is folded and kept to the left of Mata Saraswati and one sari is folded and kept the right of Mata Maha Kali. Thereafter, one garment is spread on the upper side of the Pindis, horizontal to them and another garment is folded and kept below the Pindi of Mata Saraswati. During winters one shawl is also placed along the upper side of the holy Pindis in an horizontal fashion.

All the garments that are used are red in colour. Among Hindus, the red colour is considered auspicious and the bridal dress of all the girls is red. The red clothes that the Pindis are adorned in symbolise that Goddess Vaishno Devi is in her bridal attire waiting for Vishnu's arival. Once the *chunnis, Saris* and *Cholas* have been placed in position, *Tilak* of each Pindi is performed with sandalwood paste. The first Tilak is performed with yellow sandalwood paste and the second Tilak is performed with red sandalwood paste. Thereafter, rice grains are placed on each of the Pindis. Once the Tilak ceremony is over, a flower is placed on each of the holy Pindis and the idols that have been placed behind the holy Pindis. Thereafter, gold necklaces are placed around each Pindi and gold "*Chatters*" are placed slightly behind each Pindi. This is followed by placing gold crowns behind each Pindi and finally one more gold *chatter* is placed on the crown adorning the Pindi of Mata Vaishno Devi Ji. Simultaneously, bangles, *chuda* (another kind of bangles) worn by brides, *Sindoor* and other items used in make up

by ladies are also placed along the chunnis. Then Dhoop is burnt before the Pindis. This is followed by worshipping the flame of the lamp that remains lit in the cave and finally *"Naived"* is offered to the holy Pindis. With this the process of adorning the holy Pindis comes to an end and a curtain is drawn covering the entire sanctum sanctorum. Immediately thereafter, Aarti commences. First the local aarti, which is credited to Shridhar, is chanted and a *Deep Shikha* is used while this is being chanted.

After the *shlokas* of the local aarti are over the curtain covering the area of the holy Pindis is removed and flower petals are placed on the holy Pindis. Then the Pujaris sing the aarti in Hindi and in Dogri. This is done to the accompainment of bells, cymbals etc. A Deepshikha and a fly whisk are used during this aarti. Thereafter, the Pujaris seek forgiveness for their sins and shortcomings.

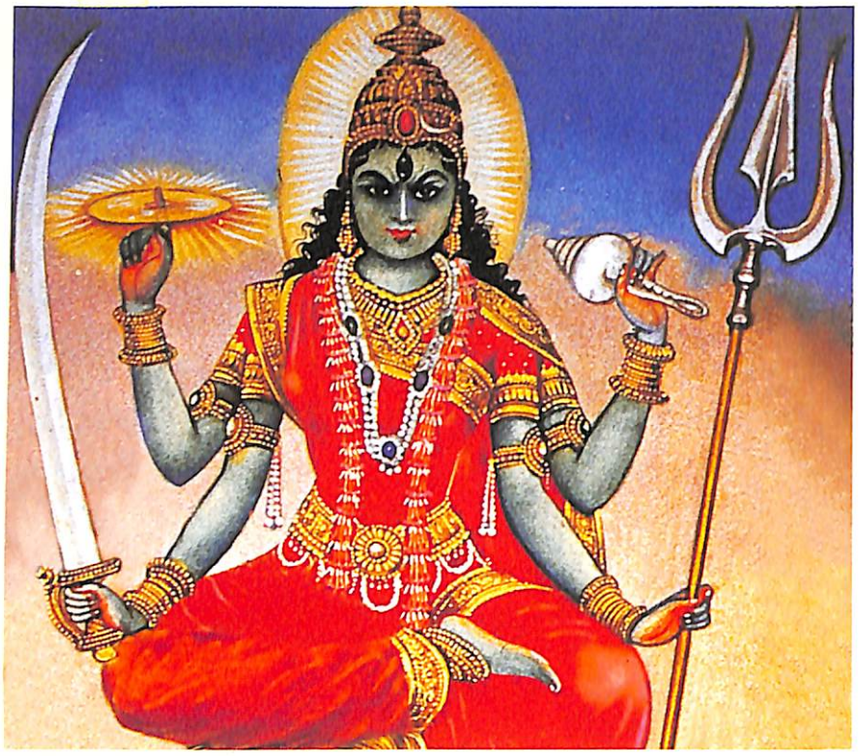
Once this is over, the main Pujari, who is a descendant of Pandit Shridhar, provides Darshan to the people present in the Cave and distributes *Prasad* among them. Then the idols behind the Pindis are covered with a curtain so that they do not distract the attention of the pilgrims who come to the sanctum sanctorum for Darshan. Thereafter, the Deep Shikha and a *Thaal* (metal plate) containing the various items used in performing the Puja are brought out of the holy cave by the Pujaris and carried to the mouth of the original tunnel. Puja is performed here too,



first of Ganesh, then the flame that remains lit round the clock and finally of the holy cave. Then *Jai Kaaras* are chanted and the Pujaris distribute *Charanamrit* amongst the waiting pilgrims. With this the Aarti comes to an end and the holy cave is once again thrown open to the pilgrims for Darhsan.

All the mantras chanted during Aarti along with their general explanation have been given in the Annexure.

THE MYTHOLOGY



MATA MAHA KALI

MATA MAHA LAKSHMI

MATA MAHA SARASWATI

THE STORY OF MADHU AND KAITABH

At the beginning of time there was only the primaeval ocean all around. Vishnu lay on Sheshnag in deep slumber under the influence of *Yog Nidra*. While Vishnu slept a lotus stalk grew out of his navel. At the upper end of the stalk was a lotus flower. Brahma was born in the lotus flower and was in deep meditation at the time of his birth. As Brahma lay in deep meditation in the lotus flower reciting the Vedas, ear wax flowed out of both ears of Vishnu. Two Asuras known as Madhu and Kaitabh were born out of the ear wax. Since Madhu and Kaitabh were also born in the water of the primaeval ocean and there was not much activity to be performed, they decided to make sincere efforts to please the Goddess so that they would be granted a boon of their choice. They performed great penance for thousands of years in order to conquer their senses. The Goddess, pleased with their devotion, appeared before them and granted them the boon that death would come to them only when they desired it.

After receiving this boon Madhu and Kaitabh thought that they had become immortal and so they became arrogant and haughty. They began to torment the creatures living with them in the water and caused them great trouble. One day the eyes of Madhu and Kaitabha fell on Brahma who sat in deep meditation in the lotus flower. They decided to confront him. Approaching him they roared very loudly in his ears in order to bring him out of his meditation. Brahma's concentration was broken. He opened his eyes and was quite taken aback when he saw the two Asuras menacingly advancing towards him with the clear intent of killing him. Their blazing eyes and the rage writ large on their faces frightened Brahma out of his wits and he rushed in great consternation to Vishnu to seek his protection. Vishnu, however, was in deep sleep under the influence of Yog Nidra and did not wake up inspite of the best efforts of Brahma. When Brahma realised that he could not wake up Vishnu in the normal course as he was sleeping under the influence of Yog Nidra, he decided to change his strategy and placate Yog Nidra first. He then began to pray to Yog Nidra and beseeched her to help him to awaken Vishnu. The fervent prayers of Brahma and his plaintive beseeching pleased Yog Nidra and She asked Brahma what he wanted. Brahma told her with great humility that he was in desperate straits due to the murderous intent of Madhu and Kaitabh and it was imperative for him to awaken Vishnu and seek His protection. Yog Nidra took pity on Brahma's plight, left Vishnu's body and stood aside. As soon as Yog Nidra left his body, Vishnu woke up. He saw Brahma standing before him looking frightened and desperate. He asked Brahma what the matter was and Brahma told him about the murderous intent

of Madhu and Kaitabh and entreated Him to destroy them. Vishnu agreed and sallied forth to do battle with the two Asuras.

Vishnu mounted a ferocious assault on Madhu and Kaitabh but the two brothers countered it easily. Then they launched a counter attack which was repulsed by Vishnu. The battle between Madhu and Kaitabha on the one side and Vishnu on the other side continued thus for five thousand years. First Madhu would go into battle with Vishnu and when he began to tire, Kaitabha would enter the battle field and allow Madhu to get some rest. However, there was no respite for Vishnu as he was constantly engaged in battle with either of the two brothers. Vishnu was quite surprised at the ability of the two brothers to withstand his assaults. He began to meditate upon the cause for the prowess of the two brothers. Then, through his mind's eye he saw that they had been granted a boon by the Goddess that they would die only when they so desired. Vishnu, therefore, decided to seek the help of the Goddess to destroy the two Asuras. He meditated upon Her and when She appeared before him he requested Her to help him in killing the two Asuras. The Goddess informed him that the two Asuras could not be killed in the normal course because of the boon granted to them by Her. She advised Vishnu that he would have to take recourse to deceit if he wanted to kill Madhu and Kaitbha. Vishnu agreed and the Goddess spread her *Maya* or illusion in order to mar the intelligence of the two Asuras for some time. When Vishnu saw that the *Maya* of the Goddess had taken hold of the senses of the two Asuras, he called out to them and said, "I am very pleased with the two of you for your valour and prowess. I wish to reward you. So, ask for any boon and I shall grant it." The two Asuras, who had been deprived of their normal intelligence as a consequence of the *Maya* of the Goddess, laughed at Vishnu scornfully and retorted, "Vishnu, you can grant us nothing as we are stronger than you. But we have found you to be a worthy foe and would like to reward you. So, seek a boon from us." Vishnu, who had been waiting for such an opportunity, promptly addressed Madhu and Kaitabha thus, "Oh mighty warriors! if you are truly pleased with me then grant me the boon that I should be able to kill you". The two Asuras realized that they had been trapped by Vishnu and that they could not escape granting him the boon. However, by this time the impact of the Maya spread by the Goddess had ceased and the innate craftiness of the two Asuras had reasserted itself. They decided to qualify the boon in such a manner that it would become impossible for Vishnu to take advantage of it. They, therefore, said, "Vishnu, you can kill us at any place except in water." They presumed that as the primaeval ocean was spread every where, there was no place which was dry. Therefore, Vishnu would not be able to kill them. Vishnu, however, picked them up and placed them on his thigh and raised it above the water so that it formed a dry place. At this Madhu and Kaitabha also enlarged their bodies correspondingly in order to ensure that some part of their bodies always touched the water. Vishnu, however, continued to extend his

thigh further and further till such time that Madhu and Kaitabh could not enlarge their bodies any more. Consequently, a stage came when their bodies were no longer in contact with water. Thereafter, Vishnu caught hold of the two brothers and killed them. It is said that so much fat or *medas* fell from the dead bodies of the two Asuras into the Primaeval ocean that it collected into a high mound which subsequently became the earth. That is why the earth is also called *Medini* or *Meda* or fat.

Emergence of the Goddess from the Tejas

THE STORY OF MAHISHASURA

Danu had two sons called Rambha and Karambha. The two brothers were greatly respected by the Asuras. However, they were both childless. Therefore, they decided to perform Tapasya in order to beget sons. Karambha began Tapasya while standing in water while his brother Rambha began to perform his Tapasya while standing amidst *Panchagni* or the five fires. The intensity of the Tapasya of Karambha frightened Indra who erroneously presumed that the two Asura brothers were performing these austerities in order to oust him from his position of pre-eminence. So, he assumed the form of a crocodile and dragged Karambha under water and killed him. When Rambha learnt that Indra had killed his brother for no fault of his, he was disconsolate with grief. He decided to kill himself by making an offering of his own head to the five fires. He then set about making preparation for doing so. Meanwhile, *Agni*, the god of fire, was pleased with Rambha's Tapasya and appearing before him urged him to ask for a boon. Rambha asked to be blessed with a son who would not only conquer the three worlds and vanquish all those who were hostile to him, but who should also be able to assume any form at will. He added, "No Deva, Asura or man should be able to defeat this son of mine". *"Tatha Astu"* (So be it), said Agni. He added, "Rambha, you will bring forth such a son by your union with the first female who enamours you."

After obtaining the boon that he had been praying for, Rambha left for home. On the way he came across a very beautiful she buffalo or *Mahishi*. So attracted was he by her beauty that Rambha took the Mahishi physically and impregnated her. Then he decided to take her home alongwith him. While Rambha and the Mahishi were journeying together a ferocious male buffalo also took a fancy for the Mahishi and began to make advances towards her. Rambha was annoyed and tried to drive him away. However, the buffalo was very strong and he gored Rambha to death. Mahishi was terrified and fled for protection to some *Yakshas* living nearby. The Yakshas took pity on her and killed the overbearing male buffalo. Thereafter, they prepared a funeral pyre on which Rambha could be cremated. They then placed Rambha's dead body on the pyre and set fire to it. Mahishi also jumped into the burning pyre in order to peform *Sati* (burn oneself to death) with her husband. Suddenly, a huge buffalo *(Mahisha)* jumped out of the fire. It was the son, Agni, the fire god, had promised would be born to Rambha. Simultaneously, Rambha who had pined for a son for so long and for whose birth he had performed such great Tapasya also assumed a new form and sallied forth from the funeral pyre. Rambha had now

become Raktabija and his son was Mahishasura. Both of them possessed enormous strength, the son more so than the father. Mahishasura was indeed a very powerful Asura and he conquered the world. Thereafter, he decided to propitiate Brahma and seek the boon of immortality from him. He proceeded to the Sumeru mountain and immersed himself in intense Tapasya. His Tapasya continued for ten thousand years. Brahma was pleased and appeared before him. Mahishasura requested Brahma to grant him the boon of immortatity. The request was turned down as such a boon could not be granted to any living thing. Then Mahisharura asked for and was granted the boon that no male of any kind should be able to kill him. His death should be only at the hands of a female. Mahishasura had reasoned that since females are physically weaker than men there was no possibility of any female being able to kill him. Thus he would, for all practical purposes, become immortal. After obtaining the boon Mahishasur decided to conquer *Dev Lok* where Indra ruled. He, therefore, sent a message to Indra to either accept his over Lordship or get ready for war. In fury, Indra sent back an equally insulting reply to Mahishasura through the latter's messenger. Thus war between two sides became inevitable.

Mahishasura ordered a general mobilization of his forces and sent for all his generals who were located in different areas. Meanwhile, Indra also took stock of the situation and decided to approach Brahma for assistance in view of the enormous threat posed by Mahishasura and his armies. Indra went to Brahma and informed him about the threat of an impending attack on Dev Lok by Mahishasura. Brahma pondered over the situation and concluded that it would be wise to consult with Shankar and Vishnu. So, he took Indra along and the two of them went to *Mount Kailasha* and apprised Shankar of the situation. Then all of them went to *Vaikuntha* to meet Vishnu. A War Council was held at Vaikuntha in which apart from Vishnu, Shankar and Brahma, all the Devas led by Indra participated. The War Council resolved to declare war upon Mahishasura. All the Devas and Vishnu, Shankar and Brahma collected their weapons, rallied their forces and marched into battle mounted on their special mounts. Mahishasura was already waiting for them along with his forces. The two armies clashed with a terrific impact and the main warriors on both sides began to kill and maim the enemy forces with grim determination. It was a ding-dong battle with the advantage sometimes lying with the Devas and at other times with the Asuras. Mahishasura was initially content with conducting the war from the high ground he had selected for locating his command post and sending his generals to do the actual fighting. However, when even after the lapse of an inordinately long time there seemed to be no sign of victory he decided to enter the fray himself.

Mahishasura's entry into the war tilted the scales in favour of the Asuras and the Devas were routed. Vishnu, Shankar and Brahma left the battle field. Indra fled to save his life and the other Devas also took to their heels. Mahishasura's victory was complete even though he had had to

wage a one hundred years long war to attain it. Mahishasura captured Dev Lok and appropriated all the wealth and treasures of Dev Lok. Thereafter, he began to rule over his empire from Dev Lok and the various offices earlier held by the Devas were distributed by him amongst his own followers who began to perform the functions that went with those offices.

Meanwhile, the Devas, the erstwhile rulers of Dev Lok, had fallen on hard times. Mahishasura's followers were always pursuing them. Apprehensive of every one and every thing, their hearts full of trepidation, the Devas were overcome by a terrible sense of despondency. They skulked from place to place in desperate search for safe havens where Mahishasura and his spies would not be able to find them or harm them. Finally, one day all the Devas were able to get together. They took stock of the situation and realising that their position was still desperate and that they still could not successfully fight against Mahishasura they decided to once again approach Brahma for help.

The Devas again called upon Brahma and narrated their tale of woe to him and beseeched him for help. After hearing their sad story Brahma decided that the problem called for wider consultation and so took them to Shankar. The Devas apprised Shankar of their plight and the ever increasing strength of Mahishasur. Brahma and Shankar then held a meeting and agreed that they should also associate Vishnu in their enterprise. So, once again all of them went to Vaikuntha and approached Vishnu with the problem. Vishnu gently reminded all of them that earlier too the Devas had fought with Mahishasura but had come to grief. He told them that Mahishasura derived his strength and his invincibility as a result of the boon granted by Brahma. As per that boon, no Deva, Asura or Man could kill Mahishasura. He could, however, be killed by a woman said Vishnu. Unfortunately, none of the wives of the Devas or the wives of Brahma, Shankar or even his own wife was well versed in the art of war. If any of them was sent to battle with Mahishasura or even if all of them were sent together to battle with Mahishasura they would surely be defeated. The Devas looked crest fallen when Vishnu spoke thus, because it appeared to them that their fate was sealed for ever.

The sight of despair writ large on the faces of the Devas moved Vishnu to pity. So, he decided to relieve them of their agony. He informed the Devas that there was one way by which the problem of Mahishasura could be surmounted. If all the Devas collectively pooled their *Tejas* and prayed to the Goddess it was possible that a female of enormous power could be created who could defeat Mahishasura. He, therefore, advised Brahma, Shankar and all the Devas to pool their Tejas so that out of the collective Tejas of all of them would emerge a Goddess of unsurpassing beauty and strength. Upon hearing the advice of Vishnu all the Devas concentrated their Tejas and pooled them at one place. It is believed that the collective Tejas of all the Devas created so much light that millions of suns could not have matched the same. Out of this light emerged a Goddess of unsurpassing

Mahishasura's destruction

beauty. Her face was made of Shankar's energy; Her hair of Yama's energy; Her arms of Vishnu's energy; Her breasts of Moon's energy; Her waist of Indra's energy ; Her legs of Varuna's energy ; Her hips of Prithvi's energy; Her teeth of Brahma's energy; Her lips of Prajapati's energy ; Her eyes of Agni's energy; Her ears of Vayu's energy. Similarly the other parts of her body were created by the energies of the other Devas. The sight of the Goddess thrilled the Devas who bowed to Her and worshipped Her. Thereafter, the Devas supplied the Goddess with their own arms. Shankar gave his *Trishul*, Vishnu his *Chakra*, Varun his *Shankha* and a *Pash*, Agni gave his *Shakti* or flaming dart, Yama gave his *Danda*, Vayu gave his bow and a quiver full of arrows, Surya gave his rays, Indra gave his *Vajra*, Kuber gave his *Gada*, Brahma gave an *Akshaya mala* and a *Kumandal*, Himachal gave a lion as her vehicle or mount, Vishwakarma gave a *Parshu*, Sheshnag gave a garland of snakes and Samudra gave divine clothes and ornaments. After the Goddess was fully armed and accoutered, the Devas began to worship Her again. They praised Her capabilities and exhorted Her to destroy Mahishasura who had caused them innumerable hardships. Pleased by their devotion the Goddess assured the Devas that She would indeed kill Mahishasura in battle shortly. So saying the Goddess went into peals of laughter.

The laughter of the Goddess sounded like the claps of thunder, but a hundred times louder. It filled the sky and the earth. Its reverberations caused the earth to quake and it shook the mountains as violently as a wet dog shakes its body to rid it of extra moisture after a bath. The deafening noise of the laughter and the unexpected quaking of the earth curdled the blood of the Asuras and sent shivers of fear down their spine. The power and intensity of the laughter, however, electrified the Devas who cheered the Goddess mightily. Mahishasura also heard the deafening noise of the spine chilling laughter and went into a paroxysm of rage because the laughter sounded to him as if some one was challenging his unquestioned supremacy. He immediately despatched his spies to locate the source of the noise in order to take suitable measures to neutralise the challenge.

The spies moved in the general direction from which the noise seemed to be emanating. Shortly thereafter they were able to zero in on the exact location and they espied the Goddess sitting astride a lion in all her resplendent glory. Her sheer physical beauty and magnificence stunned the spies and Her eight arms, each holding a weapon of war, awed them. They had never seen a being with eight arms leave alone one that radiated so much effulgence! The spies hurried back and reported the matter to Mahishasura. The description of the Goddess sitting astride a lion and holding the weapons of war intrigued him and the details of Her physical attributes and Her beauty whetted his lust. Mahishasura, therefore, decided to win Her over and marry her. He sent one of his Ministers to the Goddess with instructions to bring Her to his palace so that he could possess Her. The Goddess, however spurned the proposal and sent back a message

All the Gods worshipping the Goddess

through the Minister that Mahishasura should either seek refuge in *Patal Lok* or get ready to die at Her hands, because She had come to the earth to execute him.

The Minister returned to Mahishasura and conveyed the Goddess's rejection of Mahishasura's proposal for matrimony. This infuriated the Asura who decided to possess the Goddess through the use of force. He despatched a general, Tamra by name, with a large army to forcibly drag the Goddess to his presence. However, the Goddess frightened Tamra out of his wits and he fled back to Mahishasura for safety. Tamra's ignominious return made Mahishasura pause. He realized that this female was no weakling and that he would have to make a more serious effort if he wished to either vanquish Her or possess Her. He then decided to send two brave and experienced generals, called Bashkal and Durmukh, alongwith a powerful host to capture the Goddess. The two generals underestimated the prowess and the strength of the Goddess and engaged Her in battle when She refused to accompany them to the palace of Mahishasura. A terrible battle was fought in which not only did the Goddess kill both Durmukh and Bashkal, but She also annihilated the army that was accompanying them. Thereafter, Mahishasura sent many other generals alongwith powerful armies but the Goddess continued to kill them with ease. Finally, Mahishasura decided to enter the battlefield himself. A fearful combat commenced between the Goddess and Mahishasura. They were both experts in the art of war and were equipped with extremely potent weapons. These were freely used against each other. During the course of the war Mahishasura changed his form at will. Sometimes he assumed the form of a man, sometimes of a lion, sometimes of an elephant and sometimes he fought in his natural form of a ferocious buffalo. The battle raged for ten thousand divine years and finally the Goddess was able to pin down Mahishasura and cut off his head. The death of Mahishasura sent a thrill of joy amongst the Devas who cheered the Goddess lustily. Thereafter, all of them began to worship the Goddess and praised Her for ridding the world of the evil represented by Mahishasura. Their eyes shining with adoration the Devas sang paens in praise of the Goddess and beseeched Her to come to their rescue whenever they called out to Her. Satisfied with their worship the Goddess smiled and blessed them and assured them that She would certainly come to their rescue whenever they were in serious trouble. So saying the Goddess vanished leaving the Devas to regain Dev Lok and reestablish Dharma on earth.

Dancing Apsaras

THE STORY OF VRITRASURA

A person called Tvashta was once occupying the office of Prajapati. He had a son called Vishwarupa who had three faces. Vishwarupa was, therefore, able to perform three different tasks simultaneously. With one face he would recite the Vedas, with the second face he would drink honey and with the third face he would keep a watchful eye on the world. Very early in life Vishwarupa developed a feeling of disenchantment with worldly pleasures and began to engross himself in prayers and penances. During summer he would pray while sitting by the side of *Panchagni* or the five fires, during the rainy season, he would pray while standing under the trees and during winter, he would pray while standing in water. As time passed the intensity of his prayers and penances continued to increase until he attained a stage where he was able to control his five senses. The prodigious strength of his prayers created a unique halo of light which constantly surrounded him.Vishwarupa, however, was unaware of the enormous spiritual power that his personality radiated and he continued to remain immersed in his prayers and devotion.

Indra heard of the spiritual strength of Vishwarupa and he decided to investigate things himself. When Indra beheld Vishwarupa he was stunned at the radiance which seemed to emanate from the very pores of Vishwarupa and filled the air all around him. A feeling of great insecurity seized Indra, because he was convinced that the only reason which could prompt Vishwarupa to such intense prayers was the desire to attain so much spiritual strength that he could oust the present Indra and replace him as the ruler of *Dev Lok*. Indra returned to Dev Lok very worried in deed! He began to contemplate on various ways and means through which the prayers of Vishwarupa could be disrupted so that his spiritual strength could be sapped.

Indra knew that carnal desires were dominant amongst Vishwarupa and his ilk. He, therefore, decided to send his *Apsaras* to bewitch and seduce him and thus put an end to Vishwarupa's Tapasya effectively. He summoned Urvashi, Menaka, Rambha, Tilottma and other Apsaras and ordered them to go to the place where Vishwarupa was engrossed in his prayers and weave their magic on him in order to break his concentration and lure him into the world of pleasures.

The Apsaras promised to do the needful and left. The Apsaras made a bee line for Vishwarupa's Ashram and found him immersed in his prayers. They then began to dance and sing in a very enchanting manner in order to break his concentration. What a spectacle they presented! Stunning beauties all of them, singing and dancing with gay abandon, their colourful clothes swirling around and their gem

studded jewellery throwing flashes of light in all drections. Even the birds and animals were taken in by the sheer loveliness of it all and stood around watching. However, Vishwarupa remained totally unaffected by all this. He continued to pray serenely. The sight of the sage immersed in his prayers infuriated the Apsaras who put in an even greater effort to inveigle him. But all in vain! Vishwarupa had conquered his senses and had become impervious to blandishments of all kinds.

The Apsaras stayed on in the Ashram of the sage for a few days and continued to strive to trap him in their web of beauty. However, when they realized that the sage had attained so much spiritual strength that their charms left him unmoved, the cold hand of fear clutched their hearts. They realized that they had been treading perilous ground for the last few days and the sage could have given a *Shraap* to them if he had so desired. So, the Apsaras fled in fear from the

Vritrasura's emergence

Ashram and reported their failure to Indra.

The king of Dev Lok had been waiting impatiently for the return of the Apsaras. He had been desperately hoping that they would succeed in their mission. However, their failure sent him into a state of despair. He lost his capacity for good and rational thinking and in a fit of madness he picked up his *Vajra* and went to the sage's Ashram himself. Upon reaching there he became even more infuriated when he found Vishwarupa in a trance of meditation. In rage he struck Vishwarupa with his *Vajra*. The sage's body toppled over on being struck by the Vajra and he died.

Even though Vishwarupa was dead enormous light continued to emanate from his body. This made Indra worried once more. He began to wonder whether the sage would regain life once again. Suddenly Indra espied a person by the name of Taksha standing nearby. He requested Taksha to behead the dead body of the sage in order to prevent him from coming to life once again. Taksha demurred as he did not want to be a party to such a sinful act. Then Indra offered Taksha a part of the *Homa* that he (Indra) received in every religious sacrifice if Taksha agreed to cut off the head of Vishwarupa. Taksha's greed overcame his better sense and he agreed to commit the heinous act. He took an axe and cut off the three heads of Vishwarupa. As soon as the heads were separated from the body and fell on the ground they were transformed into thousands of birds which took to the skies. The sight of thousands of birds taking flight gave a strange feeling of peace to Indra who then returned to Dev Lok. And when his conscience pricked him saying that he had committed a grave sin by killing an innocent and good person, Indra justified his action by telling himself that the one who had been slain was a blackguard who had been plotting to dethrone him. However, when his conscience refused to be assuaged he told himself that he would atone for his action at the appropriate time.

When Prajapati Tvashta was informed of the death of his son he was stricken with grief. Soon, however, he learnt that Vishwarupa had been killed by Indra without sufficient apparent reason. This knowledge transformed his grief into fury and he went into a towering rage. Consumed by the burning desire to seek revenge for the death of his righteous son he organised a *Yagya* and began to make offerings to the sacred fire while simultaneously chanting the *Mantras* from *Atharva Veda*. The Yagya continued for eight nights. On the eighth night a brilliantly shining male figure rose from the *Havan Kund*. The figure seemed to be burning as brightly as the fire from which it had emerged. Higher and higher grew the figure till he towered over every thing else. Then he folded his hands and addressed Prajapati Tvashta thus, "Father, what is my name ? What is the reason for your grief? What should I do to remove your grief? If you so desire, I will drink the ocean dry or smash the mountains and grind them to dust or even stop the rotation of the sun and the moon. Just give me your command and I shall endeavour to fulfill it". Prajapati Tvashta blessed the figure and said, "You are my son. I name you Vritra. Indra, the lord

of Devas has killed your righteous and learned brother, Vishwarupa, without any reason. This is the cause for my grief. The only way my grief can be assuaged is by the death of Indra. So, I command you to go and destroy Indra." Tvashta thereupon fashioned many powerful weapons and equipped Vritrasura with them so that he would be properly armed when he went to war with Indra.

Vritrasura left the Havan Kund and began to range the earth in search of Indra. He was joined by hordes of Asuras who, realising his strength, became his followers. Vritrasura conquered the earth while looking for Indra. This frightened the sages who ran to Indra for safety. Meanwhile, Indra's spies also collected whatever information they could about Vritrasura and reported the matter to Indra. While Indra was collecting all relevant information about Vritrasura some of the Devas also arrived. They appeared frightened. They told him of all the inauspicious things that were happening in Dev Lok. Crows and vultures had been making horrible sounds and then crying in loud voices. Elephants, horses etc. had been shedding silent tears. Jackals had been coming into the houses at night and wailing all through the night. When Indra heard of all this he became worried. He summoned Brihaspati in order to seek his advice regarding the happenings and the impending threat from Vritrasura.

Brihaspati arrived and chided Indra for having committed the heinous sin of killing an innocent and righteous sage and said, "The consequences of a very evil or a very good deed stare the perpetrator of the deed in the face very quickly indeed! Whatever is happening in Dev Lok today is the result of your misdeed. All the Devas put together cannot defeat Vritrasura who is coming to invade Dev Lok alongwith his army in order to kill you." Brihaspati's words caused a lot of consternation amongst the listeners, many of whom ran away.

Indra immediately summoned the other Devas and informed them of the advent of Vritrasura and his antecedents. He ordered them to rally their forces urgently and launch an attack on Vritrasura and destroy him. The battle raged for a hundred long years. However, Vritrasura defeated the combined army of the Devas. Vritrasura was delighted with his victory and went to Tvashta to report his success. Addressing him, Vritrasura said, " Father, I have done as you ordered. I have defeated all the Devas, including Indra in battle. After their defeat, all the Devas took to their heels and ran for their lives just as the deer flee for their lives upon encountering a lion. Indra also ran for his life on foot leaving his mount, the famous elephant, Airavat behind. I have captured Airavat and have brought him along as a gift for you. I left Indra alive because it is a sin to kill any creature that is frightened."

Tvashta was very happy to learn about his son's victory over Indra. He, however, cautioned Vritrasura by saying that Indra was capable of unbounded treachery and, therefore, instead of resting on his laurels Vritrasura should start performing severe "Tapasya" in order to please Brahma and acquire some great boon from him.

Vritrasura obeyed his father and went into the mountains to perform his prayers and penances. He immersed himself in his prayers with such ferocious concentration that nothing could disturb him. When Indra heard that Vritrasura was performing severe *Tapasya* he was frightened and sent all kinds of agents to disturb Vritrasura's concentration. However, his efforts were of no avail and Vritrasura's Tapasya continued as before. When Vritrasura had performed his Tapasya for a hundred long years, Brahma was pleased and he appeared before Vritrasura and urged him to ask for a boon. Vritrasura asked for and was granted the boon that he would not be killed by anything made of iron or wood, or which was wet or dry or by any other kind of weapon and that his strength would continue to increase constantly. When Vritrasura was granted this boon his joy knew no bounds. He returned home happily and reported the matter to his father.

Tvashta was enormously pleased upon learning of the boon that had been granted by Brahma. He then ordered Vritrasura thus, "Son, now that you have Brahma's boon, go and defeat and kill Indra because I can neither forgive his crime of having killed my righteous son Vishwarupa, who was your elder brother, nor can I overcome the grief that strikes me whenever I think of him. The only way in which my hurt can be reduced is by the destruction of Indra." Upon hearing his father's lamentation, Vritrasura immediately mobilised a powerful army and once again attacked Dev Lok. Indra also entered the fray with his forces and the battle began. During the course of fighting Vritrasura caught hold of Indra, put him in his mouth and ate him. The Devas were thunderstruck upon seeing Vritrasura devour Indra and began to run around in confusion. They were at their wits end as to what to do till some one remembered to seek the advice of Brihaspati, the *Guru* of the gods. Brihaspati, advised them to devise some way by which they could make Vritrasura open his mouth. The Devas then fashioned a peculiar weapon which upon striking a foe could induce him to yawn. As soon as the weapon was ready they launched it at Vritrasura. The Asura brushed it away contemptuously, but the weapon did its trick. As soon as Vritrasura touched the weapon it induced in him a massive yawn. The Asura opened his mouth wide in order to yawn. As soon as he did so, Indra quickly gathered the different parts of his body and flew out of the mouth.

Indra's successful return to the battlefield galvanised the Devas and the two sides once again attacked each other. The battle raged hard and long for ten thousand years. Finally, however, Indra was defeated and Vritrasura captured Dev Lok. Vanquished in battle, Indra and other Devas fled to Lord Shanker in order to seek sanctuary there. Upon arriving at Shanker's abode, Indra and the other Devas informed him of their defeat at the hands of Vritrasura. Shanker realised that defeating Vritrasura would require a herculean effort and so he decided to seek the assistance of Brahma in this enterprise. He shepherded the Devas to Brahma. They all went and stood respectfully before Brahma and narrated their story. Brahma also understood the

plight of the Devas and both he and Shanker decided that they should all go to Vishnu for consultation. All of them went to Vishnu and narrated the plight of the Devas. Vishnu then told them that Vritrasura had become almost invincible due to the boon granted to him by Brahma. The Devas should, therefore, bide their time. Vishnu added, "Meanwhile, you must resort to diplomacy. Try to win him over by whatever means you can. Once you have won his confidence, kill him at an opportune moment." Vishnu also assured the Devas that he would certainly try to help Indra and towards this end he promised to enter the Vajra of Indra. Vishnu further advised the Devas that they should also simultaneously worship the Goddess in her form of Yogamaya so that she would so entice Vritrasura that he would lose his capacity to think straight.

The Devas accordingly began to pray to the Goddess. Pleased by their devotion the Goddess revealed Herself to them and asked them what they wanted. The Devas replied, "Oh ! kind Goddess. Please take measures to make Vritrasura lose his capacity for rational thought so that he can be killed." *"Tatha astu"*, replied the Goddess and vanished. Indra then sent a group of sages and Devas to meet Vritrasura and try to persuade him to be-friend Indra. After some time Vritrasura replied "Gentlemen, I can enter into a treaty of friendship with Indra only if he guarantees that he will not try to kill me either himself or through the other Devas during day or night with any kind of weapon, whether made of iron or wood, whether dry or wet, whether made of stone or even his own *Vajra* (thunderbolt). If he is agreeable to this arrangement then there can be peace between us. Otherwise it is not possible to have peace with Indra". The Devas agreed to the conditions laid down by Vritrasura and Indra came and signed the treaty. Thereafter, gradually Indra was able to win over the trust of Vritrasura and soon they had become friends. However, Indra was only pretending to be his friend. In reality he was constantly planning and plotting ways through which he could kill Vritrasura.

When Tvashta learnt of the burgeoning friendship between his son Vritrasura and Indra, he summoned his son and advised him thus, "Son, never trust a person with whom you have ever had a great enemity. Indra is your old foe. He is full of envy and hatred. He thinks nothing of killing through treachery. He killed your brother through deceit. He will not think even twice before killing you if he can do so. Therefore, beware of him." Vritrasura who had always obeyed his father and paid heed to his words ignored his father's advice, because by now the Goddess had woven Her spell on him and incapacitated his faculties for rational thought.

One day Indra saw Vritrasura on the sea coast. He was all alone. Dusk had fallen. The thought that this was the opportune time to kill Vritrasura flashed through Indra's mind. However, he became nervous when he remembered that Vritrasura was almost invincible. Suddenly his eyes fell on a huge mound of foam that was floating on the surface of the water.

"This foam is neither dry nor wet, nor is it hard, nor can it be called a weapon" thought Indra. He picked up a handful of the foam and concentrated on the Goddess. She immediately revealed Herself to him and then entered the foam. Indra covered his Vajra, in which Vishnu was already present, with the foam and launched the Vajra at Vritrasura. The Asura was not expecting any treachery from his "friend" Indra and so was unable to counter the blow. The Vajra hit true and hard and Vritrasura was killed on the spot.

Word spread everywhere about how Indra had sought the assistance of the Goddess for destroying Vritrasura. Indra then summoned all the Devas and together they worshipped the Goddess and praised Her for having helped them in ridding the world of such evil. The Goddess acknowledged their prayers and left. Indra and the other Devas were restored to their heavenly kingdom.

THE STORY OF INDRA'S PENANCE

Vritrasura was dead, but matters did not rest there. The sages and saints who had acted as intermediaries between Vritrasura and Indra in order to make Vritrasura accept Indra's offer of friendship were suddenly attacked by a deep sense of guilt. They realised that they had been treacherous towards Vritrasura. "Any person who advises or prompts a person to commit a sinful act also commits a sin," thought the sages. "Thus we have destroyed all the merit that we had earned through our prayers and good conduct by this single act. So the goal of *Moksha* is once again as far from us as it was when we embarked upon this path at the beginning of our lives." Such and similar other thoughts attacked the conscience of the sages and they left for the forests greatly disturbed by what they had done. When Tvashta heard that Indra had killed his second son Vritrasura also by treachery he wept with sorrow. Then he went to the place where the dead body of Vritrasura was lying and performed the last rites of his son. After concluding the last rites he put a curse upon Indra. "Just as Indra has caused me so much sorrow by killing my sons, similarly, he too shall have to endure unbearable sorrow and mortification", declared Tvashta. Thereafter, he left for Sumeru mountain and immersed himself in intense prayers.

As the sages left one by one for the forest a ground swell of disgust against the treachery of Indra became discernible. "This Indra is a killer of a Brahman" began to be whispered all around. "He gave the most solemn promises he could in order to gain Vritrasura's friendship and then murdered him in cold blood. What kind of a king of Devas is he who can break his solemn promises so easily? He is untrustworthy and thus unworthy to be the king of the Devas" said every one in quiet under- tones.

It is commonly seen that every one wishes to be-friend a person in his good times, but no one wishes to be close to him during adversity - neither parents, brothers, sisters, friends nor even his children. A sinful person has to pay for his sins all by himself. A similar thing happened with Indra. The respect and regard with which he was held amongst one and all began to evaporate. People began to speak ill of him in loud stage whispers near him so that he could hear what was being said. Indra heard and saw what was happening, but he was powerless to do anything about it except brood. The lustre which always surrounded the king of the Devas began to wane as Indra became more and more remorseful of his conduct. He stopped meeting people. His appetite for food and other good things of life disappeared. Then one day his wife Indrani asked, "Lord, you have killed your most dangerous enemy. Then why do you look so frightened ? I do not see any other enemy on the horizon who can be a danger to you. Then what is the cause for your

worry ? Why do you walk with heavy steps and take long breaths like an ordinary mortal who is confronted with insurmountable adversity." Indra replied, " Oh my queen, I know that there is no powerful enemy on the horizon who can pose a threat to me ; but I am terrified of the implications of the sin I have committed. I killed a Brahman treacherously after giving my most solemn word that we would be eternal friends. It is this thought that is constantly gnawing my heart. That is why I derive no pleasure from food, drink, songs, dance or even the company of unsurpassably beautiful women. I do not know what to do, where to go and how to atone for my sin."

Then one day Indra left home quietly and went to lake Mansarovar. All his lustre and power had gone. He no longer looked like the magnificent Indra of yore. Instead, he gave the appearance of a weak and timid person who was rather unsure of himself. Upon reaching Mansarover he entered the lake and hid himself in the stem of a lotus flower. He was so overwrought by his sinful conduct that he forgot that he was the king of the Devas and in that capacity had to perform a large number of duties.

Indra's sudden disappearance caused a lot of consternation among the other Devas. Soon the normal order of things began to break down. Clouds stopped bringing rain. Earth stopped being fertile and productive. Rivers inexplicably changed their courses. The general breakdown of order caused a lot of worry among the sages and the Devas. After detailed confabulations it was agreed that the disappearance of Indra was causing this disorder. Therefore, some one should be anointed Indra urgently so that he could quickly restore order in the Universe. The sage Nahush was selected for this singular honour and was coronated as Indra.

Nahush had been a saintly person before he ascended the office of Indra. However, his outlook towards life changed after he became Indra. He began to partake of the pleasures of life that Indra-hood conferred with great gusto. Indeed, his appetite became so voracious that one day he demanded that Indrani, the wife of the former Indra, should be called to pleasure him. The Devas looked at each other in consternation at the preposterous demand, but could do nothing except give in, because it was Indra who was ordering thus. Dutifully they went to Indrani and in subdued voices conveyed Nahush's order to her. Indrani was a devout and faithful wife. The very idea of a stranger touching her mortified her. In desperation she turned to Brihaspati, the *guru* of the Devas, for help. Brihas pati took pity on her plight and said "Devi, fear not. I shall protect you. Nahush will not be able to touch you." When Nahush (Indra) heard that Indrani had gone and sought sanctuary with Brihaspati, he was furious. He threatened to kill Brihaspati for having the temerity to come between him and Indrani. The Devas were alarmed at Nahush's anger and tried to pacify him by reasoning with him that what he was demanding was not only unjust but also immoral. However, Nahush would not budge. He told the Devas that he would find no peace until he possessed Indrani. Therefore, he ordered them to

Indrani returning from Nahush's court

display suitable enterprise and fetch the recalcitrant female urgently.

The Devas again went to Indrani who was now living in Brihaspati's Ashram and placed the matter before her and Brihaspati. Both of them realised that it would not be possible to defy Nahush's orders any longer. Then Brihaspati devised a strategy to buy time. He told Indrani, "Devi, please go before Nahush and tell him, "Lord I am willing to serve you. However, before I do that I would like to find out whether my husband, the former Indra, is alive or not. You would agree that as long as he is alive, I cannot accept any one else as my master. Therefore, it is necessary for me to make one last effort to locate him. If I am unable to find him then I will come to you". "What purpose will this kind of a discussion serve?" asked Indrani. "It will buy us time", replied Brihaspati, "to devise a concrete strategy to frustrate Nahush's evil designs. Once Nahush lets you go then we will try to find a way for you to bring back the real Indra." So, it was agreed by all that this would be the strategy that would be followed. The Devas then took Indrani with them and presented her before Nahush.

The sight of Indrani delighted Nahush and he asked her to join him immediately. Indrani, however, followed Brihaspati's advice and told Nahush that she wanted some time to ascertain whether her husband was alive or not. If he was no longer alive then she would come to him out of her own volition and gladly. Nahush was very pleased with this proposal, because he was confident that

the former Indra was dead and if his woman came to him voluntarily, it would simplify matters. So, he was expansive and agreed to Indrani's request.

Indrani returned to Brihaspati's Ashram. Once she had reached back safely the Devas and Brihaspati decided to seek Vishnu's help in locating Indra. So they all prayed to Vishnu to help them locate the former Indra and also rid them of the tyranny of Nahush. Then Vishnu appeared before them and told them that Indra should perform the *Ashwamedha Yagya*. This would also make the Goddess happy, who would wash away his sin of having killed a Brahman and a professed friend treacherously. Vishnu added that Indrani should also start worshipping the Goddess with great devotion. This would hasten the process of restoring Indra's power and the end of Nahush. Vishnu then took Brihaspati to the place where the former Indra was hiding and ordered Brihaspati to make arrangements for performing the Yagya. Once the Yagya was over, Vishnu came and blessed Indra.

As a consequence of the blessing he received from Vishnu, Indra's heart was finally at peace with himself. However, he did not come out of his place of hiding as he wished to wait for an opportune time to reveal himself. When Indrani heard that Indra had been located and his sin had been washed away by the intervention of Vishnu and the Goddess she was very happy. She eagerly began to look forward to the day he would return. However, Indra did not come and Indrani's days of waiting became longer and longer. Finally, in desperation she again turned to Brihaspati for help. Brihaspati advised her to pray to the Goddess with redoubled vigour in order to please her so that she would grant the desire of Indrani. As advised, Indrani began to practice severe austerities and penances to please the Goddess. Finally, the Goddess was pleased and appearing before Indrani commanded her to ask for any boon. Indrani replied, "Oh great Mother! Please help me to reunite with my husband and restore him to his original position. Please also save me from the advances of Nahush." The Goddess granted the boon and ordered one of her own attendants to take Indrani to Indra. The attendent took Indrani to the Mansarover lake where she finally met her dear and long lost husband.

Indra was very surprised to see Indrani. He was curious to find out how she had located him because he had thought that he had made fool proof arrangements to ensure that no one should be able to locate him. Then Indrani told him that she had been able to locate him only due to the kindness of the Goddess. Indrani then narrated the entire episode of Nahush to him and asked him to resolve the problem. Indra was furious at Nahush's temerity. However, he soon overcame his anger and began to consider the problem with a cool and calm mind. Realising that Indrani would not be able to keep Nahush at bay in the normal course he devised a proactive strategy. He then advised Indrani thus, "If you follow what I say carefully you will be able to protect your virtue. When Nahush calls you to him, go with a happy demeanour but

throw a friendly challenge at him. Tell him, 'Oh lord of the world ! I want you to come and fetch me in a divine vehicle which the sages and saints should be carrying on their shoulders.When you do that I will come to you happily". Indra added, "When Nahush agrees to do so, as he is bound to because he will be blinded by his lust at that time, the sages will certainly lay a curse upon him which will destroy Nahush." Then Indra advised his wife to pray to the Goddess to intercede and make the plan a success.

Indrani returned to Brihaspati's Ashram and then sent word to Nahush that she was back. Nahush summoned her. Indrani went to Nahush's palace and met him and indicated that she was ready to come to him. However, before she did that Nahush would have to fulfil one condition.When Nahush agreed to fulfil any condition laid down by her, Indrani said, "Vishnu rides on a Garuda, Yama rides on a buffalo, Brahma rides on a swan, Kartikeya rides on a peacock and Ganesh on a mouse. Thus all of them have their own distintive mounts. I wish that when you come to fetch me you should come on a special and unique carriage. It should be the kind of carriage which no Deva has ever used before. You should ride on a beautiful carriage which is carried by the Chief sages and saints of the universe. This will make me very happy indeed and also increase your prestige." By this time the Goddess had started working her *Maya* or illusion on Nahush as a result of which he was unable to comprehend the preposterousness of the demand and reject it. Instead, Nahush agreed to do so enthusiastically and sent Indrani back to her Ashram.

Nahush then summoned the Chief sages and told them that he needed their help. Even though he was occupying the office of Indra, he said, he had not been able to possess Indrani so far. Nahush added, " When I asked Indrani why she was delaying coming to me, she said, I will do so only when you come to fetch me on a carriage which is carried by the Chief sages." Therefore, oh great sages, please agree to do this and help me to obtain Indrani. I can not get any peace of mind until I possess her." The sage Agastya was the most famous sage of the day. He was also present when Nahush put forth his request. Agastya was amused by the quaintness of the request and marvelled at the infinite capacity of women to indulge in the game of one up manship and in the stupidity of Devas and men to indulge their women by giving in to all their preposterous demands. However, he decided to play along with the demand of Nahush and also persuaded the other sages to agree to the request.

When Nahush found that the sages had agreed he was delighted. He immediately called for a very beautiful palanquin and sat on it. The Chief sages picked up the palanquin and the procession left for Brihaspati's Ashram. Nahush was excited at the prospect of possessing Indrani soon and he began to dwell on the thought of what he would do once he had her in his arms. This made him even more excited and he wished to reach Brihaspati's Ashram immediately. So he began to urge the sages to move faster by uttering *Sarp, Sarp*. This word meant 'move faster' in Sanskrit. The word Sarp also meant a snake in the same language. The sages heard

Nahush's urging and increased their pace. However, Nahush was not satisfied and in a bid to make the sages increase their gait further he decided to goad them with his feet. Therefore, he kicked out and hit the sage Agastya on his head. Agastya was stunned. His amusement vanished and in a moment gave way to a towering rage. Meanwhile, Nahush was unmindful of what he had done and he compounded his folly by striking Agastya on the back with a whip while continuing to utter the words "Sarp, Sarp". "How dare you do this?" roared Agastya, "You lowly creature, you dare to tell us sages, "Sarp, Sarp". I curse you and delcare that you shall become a `Sarp', a huge and dangerous snake, and live thus for one thousand years. You shall face enormous hardships during this period. You shall regain your human form only after you meet a saintly person named Yudhisther in the forest and listen to his answers to your questions." Nahush was transformed in to a snake as soon as the words were uttered by the sage Agastya and he fell from Dev Lok.

After Nahush's neutralisation, Brihaspati immediately left for Mansarovar and gave the good news to Indra. The other Devas also left for Mansarovar on learning that Indra was there. All of them urged Indra to return to Dev Lok and reoccupy his throne. Indra agreed. Then all of them, Indra, the other Devas and their guru Brihaspati returned to Dev Lok and arrangements were made for the recoronation of Indra. Once the ceremony was over Indra again ascended the throne and began to rule the heavens wisely.

THE STORY OF ASURA HAYAGRIVA

Hayagriva was a son of Kashyap Praja Pati by his wife Danu. Shortly after his birth Hayagriva began to practise great penances and worshipped the Goddess in great earnest on the banks of river Saraswati. After great Tapasya lasting for over one thousand years he was able to please the Goddess who appeared before him and directed him to ask for a boon. Hayagriva asked for the boon of deathlessness which meant that he should never die. The Goddess told him that whoever was born must die. "There is no escape from death because mortality is the way of the world," said the Goddess. She then bade him to ask for some other boon.

Then Hayagriva asked for and was granted a boon by the Goddess to the effect that he could be killed only by another "Hayagriva" or one with a horse's neck. After receiving this boon Hayagriva became haughty and arrogant and came into conflict with the Devas. However, the Devas could do him no harm because of the boon granted by the Goddess. Therefore, slowly but surely Hayagriva was able to overcome the Devas after a long and fearful battle. Vanquished, the Devas then appealed to Vishnu who agreed to come to their aid. The battle between Vishnu and the Devas on the one side and Hayagriva on the other continued for ten thousand years. Vishnu then felt tired and decided to go to Vaikuntha for recouping his energy in order to give battle to Hayagriva later. Once Vishnu left the field of battle, the victory of Hayagriva was complete and the Devas fled from the field of battle in terror and confusion.

During his rest Vishnu sat in *Padmasana* with his head supported by the upper end of his bow which was still strung with the cord while the other end of the bow rested on the ground. In this posture Vishnu went into a deep slumber. He remained asleep for a long time. Meanwhile, Hayagriva continued to increase his strength. The Devas became terrified of the strength being accumulated by Hayagriva and wanted to destory him. They, therefore, decided to perform a *yagya* where they could get more power and once again do battle with Hayagriva. All arrangements for the yagya were completed but since Vishnu was the master of the yagya it could not commence in his absence. The Devas, therefore, decided to start looking for him. They finally located Vishnu in Vaikuntha and sat near him waiting for him to wake up. However, Vishnu's slumber did not break. Then Brahma hit upon a plan to wake up Vishnu. He thought that if they broke loose the cord that was strung on the bow, it would result in the bow straightening up suddenly. The sudden movement would certainly rouse Vishnu from his slumber. Brahma then created *chitals* or termites and directed them to gnaw away the end of the bow which was resting on the ground.

The termites refused saying that "Lord, why should we cut this cord? What will we gain out of it ? No one does anything unless that act provides some benefit to him. If we wake up Vishnu by cutting the cord it will benefit the Devas who want him awake. However, we will only earn *Paap* from this act. So unless there is some benefit for us we will not do this reprehensible deed." Brahma then assuaged their sentiments by saying that if they performed the task that had been assigned to them, he would grant them the boon that henceforth all the offerings that were made at the *Yagyas* in future and which were not consumed by the sacred fire would be collected and offered to the progeny of the termites. The chitals or the termites were happy at this arrangement and agreed to eat away the end of the bow which was resting on the ground.

The termites began to gnaw at the end of the bow which was resting on the ground and after some time they successfully ate it away. As a result the cord of the bow snapped loose and the bow of Vishnu straightened with a sudden jerk. The sound made by the cord breaking loose was so fearful that the universe quaked with the sound, it became dark everywhere and the Devas shut their eyes in terror. The loosened cord then whipped up with such speed and power that it severed Vishnu's head from his body and it fell into the sea.

When Brahma and the other Devas opened their eyes after the deafening sound made by the cord of the bow breaking loose had died down, they found themselves staring at the headless torso of Vishnu. The Devas were horror stricken at this unexpected turn of events. Stupefaction soon gave way to helplessness and the Devas began to weep and cry at this colossal loss. Brahma then advised the Devas to stop weeping and start worshippping the Goddess because only she could help them to overcome this incalculable loss. So, the Devas prayed very hard and entreated the Goddess to do something to restore Vishnu to life and remove their misery.

The prayers of the Devas pleased the Goddess and even though she did not reveal Herself to them yet She addressed them collectively. Her voice seemed to be coming from all points of the horizon simultaneously. She said, "Devas, be calm. I am pleased with your devotion. So I will tell you why Vishnu's head has got cut off. Nothing in this Universe happens without reason. Once Vishnu and Lakshmi were sitting alone. Lakshmi was looking even lovelier than usual. The sight of her beauty pleased Vishnu so much that he smiled. Lakshmi mistook the genuineness of the smile and thought that Vishnu had smiled at her ironically because he now thought that she had become ugly. This thought infuriated Lakshmi so much that she cast a curse upon him by saying "Let this head of yours fall off". However, even this curse was not without reason. There was a larger design behind it. Lakshmi had been prompted to curse Vishnu thus because it was only in this way that Vishnu could become headless and take on another head in order to fulfil a major task for the Devas." The Goddess continued, "the Asura Hayagriva can be killed by no one except

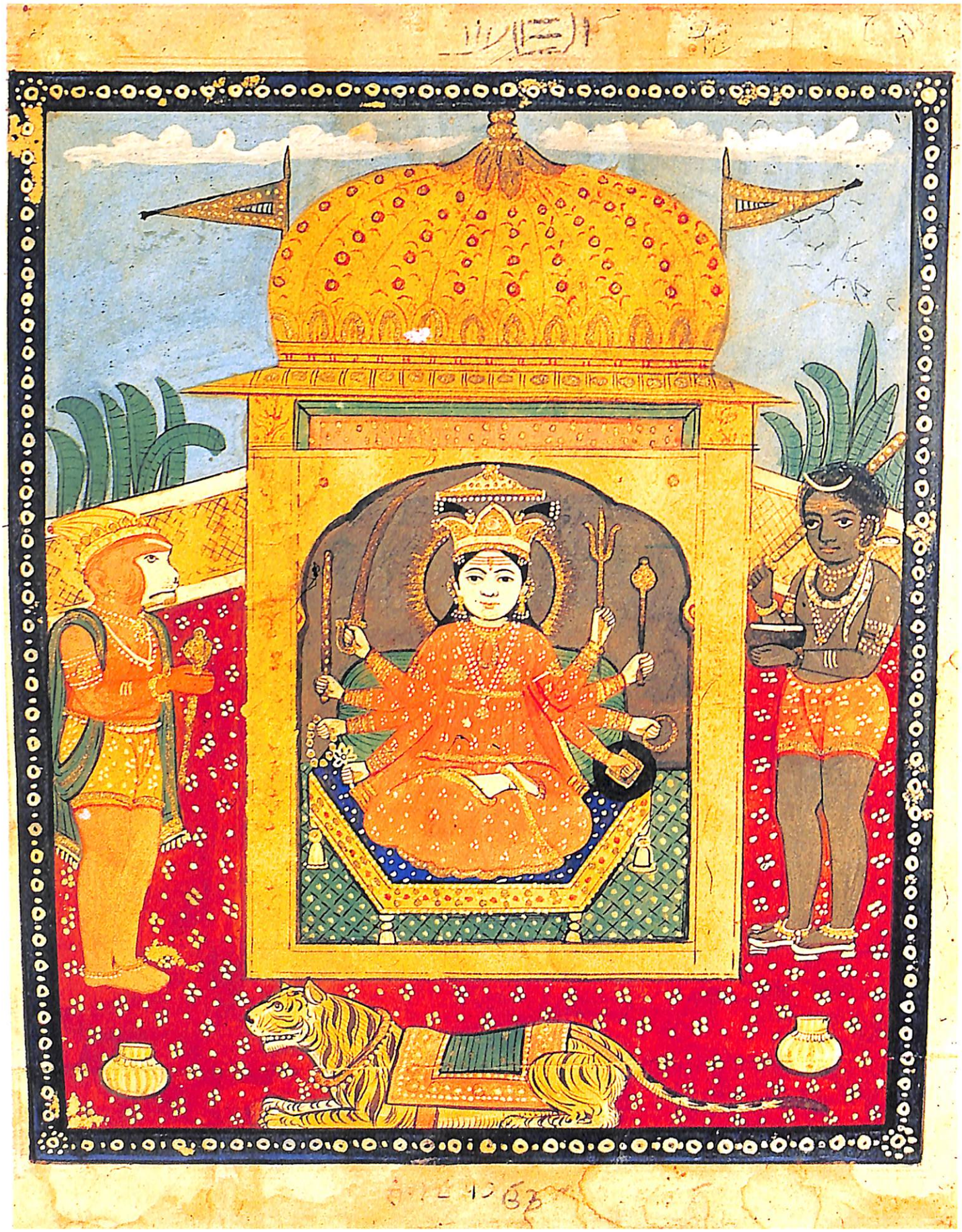
another Hayagriva. That is my boon to him. So, none of you, either singly or collectively can kill him. The only way you can do so is by joining the head of a horse to Vishnu's torso so that he also becomes a Hayagriva. Only then can the Asura Hayagriva be killed."

So saying, the voice from the sky fell quiet. Brahma thereafter immediately cut off the head of a horse and joined it to the torso of Vishnu. Thus Vishnu was incarnated as Hayagriva and he and the Asura Hayagriva remained locked in battle for a long time until finally Vishnu overcame the Asura Hayagriva and killed him.

THE STORY OF SHUMBHA AND NISHUMBHA

Shumbha and Nishumbha were two Asura brothers. They used to live in *PATAL LOK*. Both the brothers were very strong and very brave. They feared no one. However, the thought of death always haunted them. They knew that since they had taken birth they were bound to die. Therefore, they decided that one day they would propitiate God and seek the boon of immortality from Him. So, on attaining adulthood they came on *Bhu Lok* and decided to commence Tapasya in order to please God and motivate Him to grant them their cherished boon. The two brothers went to Pushkar, a holy place of pilgrimage, renounced food and water and began to meditate upon God. They grew pale and wan in the absence of proper nourishment but they persevered with their Tapasya. They continued their Tapasya for ten thousand long years. Finally, Brahma was pleased and he appeared before them. Addressing the two brothers, he said, "I am pleased with your Tapasya. Ask for the boon that you desire so that I may grant it." Brahma's vision sent the two brothers into a blissful state of ecstasy. The thought that their goal was so near thrilled them. Collecting their wits about them they addressed Brahma thus," "Lord, you are kind to your devotees and shower them with your munificence. Therefore, Lord, if you are pleased with us then grant us our cherished boon." "Speak your mind," said Brahma. "Lord", said the two brothers, "we fear nothing in this world. However, the thought of our death terrifies us. That is why we have sought refuge in you. Please make us immortal so that we are relieved of this fear of death forever." Brahma smiled and said gently, "Whoever is born must die and whoever dies must take birth. That is the law of the Ulitmate Creator. Even I cannot tamper with it. All the Devas, Indra, Surya, Yama, Varun etc. all the oceans and the mountains of the earth, all the planets, all the worlds, nay the entire creation is mortal. It shall die in time. Therefore, what you seek is unattainable. Ask for something else and I shall grant it." The two brothers mulled over the issue for some time and then spoke, "Lord, kindly grant us the boon of immunity from death at the hands of Devas, Asuras, humans, animals and birds. We seek that no male from any of these kinds should be able to kill us. We do not fear the females of any of these kinds because females are by nature weak and there is no female in this world who can kill us." Brahma smiled and saying " So be it," vanished.

The two brothers returned home. They approached the famous sage Shukracharya, and rendered their reverential greetings to him. Satisfied by the respect shown to him Shukracharya fashioned a throne made of silver, worked out a propitious time and presented the throne to the brothers. Since Shumbha was the older of the two brothers he



mounted the throne and was crowned king. Word of the incredible valour and strength of the two brothers and the fact that the older of the two had been coronated king spread very quickly among the Asuras. After the death of Mahishasura aeons ago the power and influence of the Asuras had virtually dwindled to a nought. The rise of Shumbha and Nishumbha once again gave heart to the Asuras who flocked to the standard of Shumbha. The most famous among these were the brothers, Chanda and Munda, Dhumralochan and the incredible Raktabija. All of them brought vast armies with them which joined Shumbha's army and swelled its ranks.When Shumbha had collected a large enough host he decided to attack Indra, the king of Dev Lok. His army marched to battle under the leadership of his brother Nishumbha. A very bloody battle ensued during the course of which Nishumbha suffered serious injuries and lost consciousness. Learning that his dear brother had lost consciousness due to the injuries inflicted by the Devas, Shumbha became wild with anger. He decided to go to the battlefield and conduct the war personally. On Shumbha's arrival the Asuras mounted a fierce counter attack on the Devas in which most of them suffered serious injuries. Realising their inability to resist the ferocious assault of the Asuras all the Devas, including Indra, fled from the battle field and took to their heels. The Asura army gave a hot chase to the Devas who in their fear and confusion fled to the mountains and hid themselves in caves, ravines and forests. Consequently, Dev Lok lay unprotected and Shumbha took control of it. He also arrogated for himself and his followers the various offices that the Devas had held hithertofore. Shumbha continued to rule Dev Lok for one thousand years.

After a long time the Devas got together and approached the sage Brihaspati and requested him to help them overcome their difficulties. Brihaspati pondered over the problem for some time. Then he remembered that at the time of Mahishasura's destruction the Goddess had promised the Devas that she would come to their rescue whenever they were in grave difficulties. Turning to the Devas he said, "If you recall, the Goddess had promised you aeons ago, at the time of Mahishasura's destruction, that she will come to your rescue whenever you are in grave difficulties. Therefore, you should all go to the Himalaya mountains and try to propitiate the Goddess by worshipping her with full devotion".

The Devas then went to the Himalayas and began to pray to the Goddess with complete humility and devotion. Pleased with their worship the Goddess manifested Herself and said, "Respected Devas, why are you immersed in such intense prayers? And why are all of you looking worried"? The Devas replied, "Oh, great Goddess! We have come to you for refuge. The Asuras have made our life miserable. They are led by two brothers, Shumbha and Nishumbha, who are invincible. They have ousted us from Dev Lok and are its masters now. They are always plotting to capture and kill us and do not give us any respite. They have made our position desperate. Please

take pity on us and destroy Shumbha and Nishumbha. It is only then that the world will heave a sigh of relief and peace and *Dharma* will again be restored." When the Goddess heard the Devas lamenting thus She was moved to pity and She created another Goddess out of her own being who came to be known as "Kaushiki". The effort of creating another Goddess out of her own being was so great that the complexion of the Goddess turned dark and somber. The black complexion of the Goddess got her the sobriquet of "Kalika". The new incarnation of the Goddess as Kaushiki was, however, as resplendant as the original version of the Goddess had been. Kaushiki then asked the Devas to take heart as She would destroy all the Asuras including Shumbha and Nishumbha. So saying, She mounted Her lion and left for the capital city of the Asuras. Kaushiki ordered Kalika to accompany her.

Kaushiki halted short of the city and set up an Ashram there. Then She began to play divinely beautiful music. As the notes of the music merged into each other even the birds and animals in the area were charmed. They slowly gathered around the Ashram and stood there listening in rapt attention. The enchanting music also caught the attention of Chanda and Munda, two famous generals of Shumbha. These two Asuras had been camping in the vicinity of the place where Kaushiki had set up Her Ashram. When the sound of the music being played by Kaushiki wafted over the air and fell in their ears, they stood there entranced. Their feet carried them to the Ashram of Kaushiki where they saw the supremely beautiful Goddess playing enchanting music. As the notes of the music died down Chanda and Munda regained their wits and hurried back to the capital to report the matter to Shumbha. When they reached the palace and were granted an audience by Shumbha, they reported the matter about this stunningly beautiful woman, who rode a lion and played such divinely beautiful music to him. Shumbha heard them without interruption. The description of the beauty of Kaushiki intrigued him and he decided to have her brought to his palace.

He sent one of his emissaries, Sugriv by name, with instructions to sweet talk Kaushiki into coming over to his palace. Sugriv went to Kaushiki's Ashram and after praising Shumbha's prowess urged her to accompany him to the palace of Shumbha so that the Asura king could make Her his wife. Kaushiki smiled and said, "I have heard of the valour of the two brothers, Shumbha and Nishumbha. I know that they have conquered the three worlds and are invincible. I am also aware of the fact that they are today the masters of all the wealth that exists in the world. And to tell you the truth I wish to marry someone like them. I have checked out all the Devas, all the humans and all the Asuras and discovered that all of them are overwhelmed by their fear of the two brothers. That is why I decided to come to this place, so far away from my home in the Himalayas, and take a look at them. So, go back to Shumbha and convey the following message to him in private. "Oh king! you are the strongest among the strong and handsomest among the handsome. You are generous, brave, clever, learned and valorous.

You own incredible riches and are fiercely independent. I am greatly impressed with your qualities. I do wish to get married and I would like my husband to possess similar qualities. However, there is one problem in my marriage. One day while I was playing with my friends, many years ago, we began to test our strength. I was very strong even then and easily demonstrated to them that I was the strongest person around. Then one of my friends taunted me by saying that however strong I may be among women, I could never match the strength of a man. This touched my pride and I took a vow that I would marry only that person who could vanquish me in battle and take me forcibly. So, Oh King! this vow of mine stands between me and my marriage. Therefore, you or your brother should come to the field of battle, try to vanquish me and if you are victorious take me away forcibly and marry me." Sugriv was quite astonished to hear Kaushiki's words of war. He gently remined her that it was the mighty Shumbha whose proposal he was carrying and not any ordinary mortal's. Therefore, even though pride and vanity had their place in the normal scheme of things, it was sometimes more appropriate to temper them with circumspection. Otherwise, a foolishly proud person was likely to come to grief when confronted with a far more powerful adversary. However, Kaushiki refused to relent and instead urged Sugriv to fulfil his role of an emissary properly and convey her message to Shumbha honestly. Sugriv returned to the palace and reported the matter to Shumbha faithfully.

DHUMRALOCHANA'S DEATH

When Shumbha heard Kaushiki's words which smacked of foolish pride he consulted his brother, Nishumbha, as to what should be done. After discussions it was decided that Dhumralochana, one of the generals of Shumbha, should go along with an army to the Ashram of Kaushiki and bring her forcibly to the palace. Dhumralochana was also ordered to put to the sword any one-Deva, man or beast-who offered opposition while he was carrying out the operation. Dhumralochana left with a large army for the Ashram of Kaushiki. Upon reaching there he saw both Kaushiki and Kalika talking to each other. Approaching Kaushiki he introduced himself and urged her to agree to marry Shumbha. Kalika then intervened and severely berated Dhumralochana for having the temerity to reopen an issue which had been rejected decisively by Kaushiki. She then taunted him for not having the courage to engage her in battle. Stung by the words, Dhumralochana became furious and picked up his bow and began to rain arrows on Kalika. However, Kalika easily cut them away and launched a furious

assault in which she destroyed the mount of Dhumralochana and killed a large number of his soldiers. Dhumralochana then picked up his deadly steel mace and rushed towards Kalika to bludgeon her to death. Seeing him coming at her, Kalika let out a blast of air from her lungs which was so hot that it burnt Dhumralochana to cinders. The death of Dhumralochna broke the morale of his army which began to run helter-skelter.

THE DESTRUCTION OF CHANDA AND MUNDA

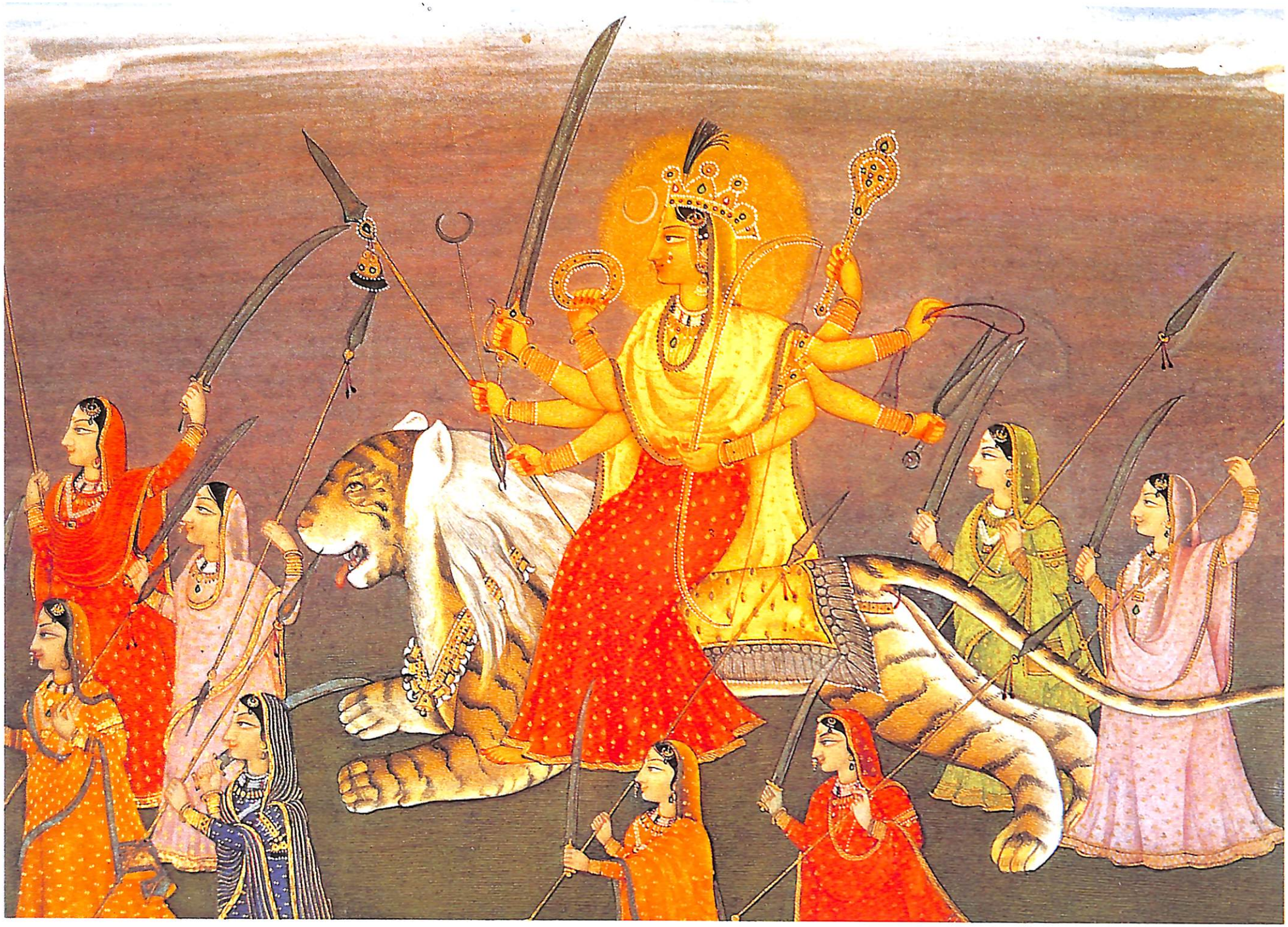
The news of the death of Dhumralochana set Shumbha thinking. He was a very intelligent person and quickly realised that what he was confronted with was no ordinary woman. Only one of the two women had single handedly killed Dhumralochan and destroyed a large army. He felt that there was much more to it than met the eye. He, therefore, decided to seek the counsel of his brother Nishumbha. The two brothers discussed the issue. Shumbha pointed out that when the time was inappropriate and unfavourable something as weak and as insignificant as a blade of grass could become as deadly as a thunderbolt and a thunderbolt could become as inconsequential as a blade of grass. Similarly, the most powerful of persons could also lose his power and virility when the stars were unfavoubly inclined. "Therefore, dear brother," Shumbha said,"please advise me whether it would be better to wage war on this woman of ineffable beauty in order to capture her and bed her or whether the better course would be to ignore the woman and withdraw from the battlefield as the stars appear unfavourable." Nishumbha thought for some

time then replied, "This is not the time for either running away from the battlefield or for hiding in the fort. This is the time for going out and waging war because our credibility is at stake. Therefore, I will go to the battlefield and attack the women. If I am victorious I will return with them as trophies of war. If, however, fate wills otherwise, I will lay down my life on the field of battle. In case I am killed in the battle, then you should wage total war on these women in order to finally decide the issue one way or the other."

Shumbha pondered over his brother's advice and found merit in it. He, however, decided to send two of his most powerful generals, Chanda and Munda, to the battlefield first before allowing his brother to go there. Chanda and Munda proceeded to the battlefield as ordered and upon reaching there found Kaushiki and Kalika waiting for them. Chanda also tried to exhort Kaushiki to give up the path of war and urged her to accept Shumbha as her husband. This, he said, would enable her to enjoy all the riches and wealth of Shumbha. He also pointed out that it was the cowardly Devas who were egging her to fight Shumbha. "The Devas are cowards," said Chanda. "They have been totally vanquished by my master Shumbha and do not have the courage to face him. So, they are using you to serve their own purpose. If you are killed in battle with Shumbha or his generals, as you most certainly will be, they stand to lose nothing. If on the other hand, the unthinkable happens and you come out victorious, the Devas gain everything. Don't you realise that you are being used as a cat's paw by the Devas?" asked Chanda.

Kaushiki laughed at Chanda contemptuously and derided him for indulging in foolish talk rather than giving battle to her. "I am the Supreme Ruler of this world. I have, over the ages, seen innumerable Shumbhas and Nishumbhas and have decimated them. Your masters, the Shumbha and Nishumbha of this age, will also be decimated like those who preceded them. And those who come in the succeeding ages will also meet the same fate. All your efforts to save your people are futile. They shall all die", declared Kaushiki. "Now pick up your weapons and fight," she added.

Chanda and Munda then picked up their weapons and attacked Kaushiki. However, they were intercepted by Kalika who took them on. She looked fearsome indeed! Her complexion was as black as the darkest thunder clouds. Her huge eyes where like orbs of white with red, bloddy rims. She wore a garland of human skulls around her neck. She had a huge mouth and her red tongue was lolling out of her black lips. She was wearing a tiger skin around her midriff and she was armed with powerful weapons. Kalika began to pick up the members of the Asura army and began to devour them. She also picked up elephants, horses and chariots and ate them up. When Chanda and Munda saw Kalika literally devouring their army they attacked her from two sides with arrows . However, Kalika not only rendered their attack ineffective by taking adequate measures, she also severely wounded the two Asuras



in her counter attack. Then Kalika tied up the two Asura generals and brought them before Kaushiki. She giggled with nerve jarring cackles and said, "Dear Kaushiki, look at these animals. They are the so called invincible generals of the Asura army. Take a good look at them before I cut off their heads". Kaushiki smiled and urged her to fulfil the task quickly. Kalika then cut off the heads of Chanda and Munda and thereafter began to drink their blood gleefully. Kaushiki was happy and said "Kalika, you have performed a great feat for the Devas. I, therefore, grant you the boon that henceforth you shall be known in the world as 'Chamunda', the one who beheaded the Asura generals Chanda and Munda".

ASURA RAKTABIJA AND HIS END

Raktabija was the most famous general of Shumbha. He had obtained a unique boon from Shankara. The boon stipulated that each drop of blood from Raktabija's body that fell on the ground would bring forth another fully grown Raktabija who would possess all the traits of the original Raktabija. This boon made Raktabija a very powerful opponent and he was deemed invincible in battle. When Shumbha heard that the Goddess had killed Chanda and Munda he decided to send Raktabija to the battlefield. He, therefore, summoned Raktabija and ordered him to go to the battlefield and destroy the two women who had caused so much havoc in the Asura ranks.

Raktabija collected a huge army and marched at its head to do battle with the Goddess. When the Goddess saw Raktabija marching at the head of a huge army she took out her battle conch shell and began to blow into it. The deafening noise that emanated from the conch shell curdled the blood of the Asura army which began to look around uncertainly. However, before they could break ranks Raktabija hurried forward and addressed the Goddess thus, "Oh beautiful lady, did you think I was a coward who could be frightened off with the sound of your conch shell. Oh, one with perfect limbs, I am not Dhumralochana who can be burnt to cinders. I am Raktabija. I fear no one and am ready to do battle with you at any time of your choosing. However, before we engage in battle I would only like to point out a couple of things. You appear to be a well read person. So, you must be aware that patience and love are the two most important facets of life. And between the two love is even more important than patience. It is only because of love that Vishnu lives with Lakshmi, Shiv lives with Parvati, Vines live with trees and males of every specie live with their females. It is only out of love that a man and woman live with each other. That is the natural order of things. It is extremely difficult to upset the natural order and conquer sexual urge, anger, greed and desire. Therefore, lovely one, you should marry a person of your liking and indulge yourself in trying to fulfil

all your fancies and fantasies. Shumbha and Nishumbha, either of the two will make an excellent partner for you. So, do not tire your beautiful body in needless war. Choose one of them as your husband and start enjoying the pleasures of the earth."

Kaushiki and Kalika were amused by Raktabija's monologue and went into peals of laughter. Then Kaushiki replied, "Listen, fool ! I have already sent an appropriate reply to Shumbha through his envoy. However, if you also wish to act as a messenger, you are welcome to do so. Go and tell Shumbha, 'Oh King of Kings, defeat me in battle, then you can marry me. Otherwise vacate the heavens and go into the *Patal Lok* so that Indra can once again be restored to his rightful place in heaven'." Kaushiki added, "Raktabija, you have come here in order to comply with the orders of your masters, Shumbha and Nishumbha, to vanquish me and take me to them. Therefore, you should either fight with me or you too should go to the *Patal Lok* and seek refuge there."

Kaushiki's words stung Raktabija and he picked up his weapons and the fighting began. The two sides appeared to be evenly matched. Suddenly, the *Shaktis* (the Devis or Wives) of the Devas also appeared on the battlefield and began to lend a helping hand to Kaushiki. Each Shakti was dressed exactly like the Deva to whom she belonged and rode on the mount of the Deva. Thus Brahma's Shakti was mounted on the swan. She was carrying an *Akshamala* and a *Kamandala*. Vishnu's Shakti came on the garuda. She was armed with a conch shell, discus and mace. Shankara's Shakti came on the bull. She was carrying a trident. Kartikeya's Shakti came riding the peacock. Indra's Shakti came mounted on the elephant. She was carrying a thunderbolt. Yamraj's Shakti was mounted on a buffalo and was carrying an iron rod. Similarly, the Shaktis of other Devas also came to the battlefield. When the Devas saw all the Shaktis rallying around Kaushiki and Kalika they were overjoyed. Shankar in his enthusiasm went to Kaushiki and Kalika and urged them to quickly exterminate the Asuras and restore peace on earth. Suddenly, a very strong Shakti emerged out of Kalika. She was terrible to behold and screamed like a banshee. This Shakti addressed Shankar thus, "Lord of the Devas ! Please go as our envoy to Shumbha and Nishumbha and give them my message. Godless ones, get out of heaven immediately so that the Devas can once again start living there and Indra can be restored to his rightful place. If you wish to live then vacate heaven immediately and proceed to Patal Lok. Otherwise, come to the battlefield and fight with me."

Shankar immediately left the battlefield and went to Shumbha's palace and delivered the message that had been sent by the Devi. Since the Goddess had made Shankar act as her envoy (*Doot*) She also began o be known as Shiv Dooti.

The chief advisers and nobles of Shumbha could not tolerate the insulting message that had been brought by Shankar and they immediately proceeded to the battlefield. Meanwhile, Kaushiki, Kalika and the other Devis were wreaking havoc on the Asura

army. The Asuras were being killed by the hundreds and the battlefield was filled with the crying of the dying and injured Asuras. When Raktabija saw what was happening to his army he was filled with a terrible anger and he decided to take on all the Devis simultaneoulsy. So, he began to fire his arrows in all directons. The Devis retaliated and began to attack him from all sides. As a result, Raktabija received many wounds and blood began to flow out of them. Then the Devis witnessed a strange sight. As soon as a drop of blood from Raktabija's body would fall on the ground, another creature exactly similar in shape, size and strength would spring out of the earth and launch a furious assault on the Devis. The Devis then decided to intensify their attack in order to kill Raktabija altogether. They were unaware of the boon that Shankara had granted Raktabija. More and more blood began to flow out of his body due to their assaults. As soon as this blood spilled on the earth, hundreds of Raktabijas sprang out of it and as the blood kept pouring out of his body thousands of Raktabijas were created. All these Raktabijas immediately attacked the Devis.

The Devas were watching the battle from the sky. When they saw innumerable Raktabijas attacking the Devi and their *Shaktis* and they found that the *Shaktis* were becoming less and less successful in fending off the attacks of the innumerable Raktabijas they became very worried. They felt that it may not be possible for the Devi and the Shaktis to withstand the assaults of Raktabija and his look alikes for long. What made their apprehension even greater was the fear that if Shumbha and Nishumbha also decided to come to the battlefield and join the fray against the Devi and the Shaktis then the Devi was bound to lose the battle as the scales would get heavily tilted against her and their hope for deliverance from Shumbha and Nishumbha would be dashed to the ground. However, Shumbha and Nishumbha did not come to the battlefield.

Meanwhile, Devi divined the cause for the creation of the innumerable Raktibijas. She realised that the greater the number of wounds that were inflicted upon Raktabija, the greater would be the blood that would pour out of his body ; and the more the blood that fell on the ground, the more the number of Raktabija look alikes that would spring out of the earth. And the larger the number of the Raktabija look alikes, the more difficult it would be to kill them all. However, Raktabija had to be killed otherwise the battle could not be won. Therefore, Devi reasoned that if Raktabija had to be killed then all the blood should be forced out of his body by inflicting more and more wounds upon him. Simultaneously, no blood from his body should be allowed to spill on the ground. This would ensure that no new Raktabijas were created. Thus by a combination of these two tactics Raktabija could be killed. Kaushiki then turned towards Kalika and said, "Chamunda, I will inflict innumerable wounds upon Raktabija. This will ensure that he loses so much blood that his body become bloodless. Meanwhile, you must ensure that not a single drop of the blood that flows out of his wounds is allowed

to fall on the ground. This will stop the creation of more Raktabija look alikes. Simultaneously, you should start devouring the other Raktabija look alikes that I kill as fast as you can so that we can eliminate this army of Asuras quickly. There is no other way of decimating this army that I can think of". So saying, Kaushiki pounced upon Raktabija and began to attack him from all sides.

The furious assault of Kaushiki severly wounded Raktabija. However, Kalika ensured that not a drop of the blood that spilled out of his body fell on the ground. When Raktabija realised the game plan of Kaushiki and Kalika, he attacked Kalika with all his might and wounded her severely. However, inspite of her injuries Kalika did not stop drinking the blood that flowed out of Raktabija's body. Gradually, the strength began to ebb out of Raktabija due to excessive blood loss. Similarly, the look alike Raktabijas were also killed one by one by Kaushiki and Kalika devoured each look alike as soon as he was killed. Finally, Raktabija himself fell down as a result of weakness brought about by the excessive blood loss that had occured due to innumerable wounds that had been inflicted upon him. Kaushiki cut off his head as soon as he fell and that was the end of the powerful Asura general, Raktabija.

SHUMBHA AND NISHUMBHA'S END

The death of Raktabija demoralised the remaining soldiers of the Asura army and they fled from the battlefield in order to seek sanctuary with Shumbha. On reaching the palace they informed Shumbha of the death of Raktabija. In voices trembling with fear they chorused, " Oh, King of Kings, Raktabija is dead. The Devi killed him. Her companion, the dark and horrible one devoured innumerable colleagues of ours like a wild animal. Initially, it was only these two who were fighting against us. Subsequently, however, a large number of other Devis joined them. Oh, great King, we had been finding it virtually impossible to defeat these two Devis. How could we, therefore, withstand the onslaught of all the Devis combined ?" The soldiers went on to suggest to Shumbha that it would be more prudent to conclude a treaty of peace with the Devis as it would enable them to save their lives. The soldiers added, "Oh, King of Kings, if the Devis refuse to conclude a treaty of peace with us then it would be more desirable to go to *Patal Lok* and live there because if we continue to stay in *Dev Lok* we will certaintly be killed by the Devis." When Shumbha heard these plaintive words from his soldiers he flew into a rage. He accused them of being cowards and fair weather friends. "Dhumralochana, Chanda, Munda and Raktabija were my faithful vassals. They sacrificed their lives for me. And you expect me to forget their sacrifice and go on my knees to these women and beg for peace. These women have come here to die. So, die they shall. I shall kill them and thus avenge the deaths of my faithful vassals. Thereafter, I shall continue to rule without any problems," roared Shumbha. In the same vein he continued, " I am the master of the Universe. The entire world bows before me. And you expect me to renounce all this and go and live like a coward in Patal Lok. Which man will barter his self esteem and respect in the eyes of his bretheren for such a life." Shumbha then turned to his brother Nishumbha and said, "I am going to the battlefield to take on these women. I shall surely kill them. If, however, I die in the battle then it shall be your duty to mobilise our entire army and wage all out war on these women. You must then strive your utmost to kill these women." When Nishumbha heared these words from his brother, he protested saying that there was no need for Shumbha to take on the Devis. "Brother, please wait. I will go to the battlefield immediately and kill that dark and horrible looking Kalika. I shall then capture and bring the fair Kaushiki to you. It would be highly improper for you to go to the battle field as long as I am alive". So saying Nishumbha marched to the battlefield along with his soliders.

On reaching the battlefield Nishumbha attacked the Devi. A ferocious battle then commenced. Nishumbha was no ordinary Asura. He had enormous strength and was quite well versed in the art of war. On a number of occasions he was able to break through Kaushiki's defence, but was unable

to press home his advantage as Kaushiki would immediately change tactics and deny him the opportunity of doing any serious damage. Then Nishumbha decided to launch a frontal attack on the Goddess and picking up a mace he ran at the Goddess in order to smash her head and face. He first swung the mace at Devi's mount, the lion, and injured it. He then jumped at Devi. However, before his mace could do any damage Kaushiki stepped aside nimbly and the mace whistled through the air harmlessly. She then came forward quickly and with a mighty blow of her sword beheaded Nishumbha. The headless body of the powerful Nishumbha fell on the ground and he died. The surviving soldiers of Nishumbha's army fled to the palace and reported the unbelievable fact of Nishumbha's death to his brother Shumbha.

When Shumbha heard the news of his brother's death his fury knew no bounds. Then an old Asura general tried to calm him and advised him thus, "Oh, King, time is all powerful. He can some times conspire to convert a very powerful being into a powerless being and vice versa. All Devas and even Gods are subordinate to him. Since time is all powerful you should also respect him. At this juncture time is not in your favour. It is favouring the Devas and is against the Asuras. Time, however, is dynamic and not static. It keeps on moving and changing. It has many aspects. In one aspect it is responsible for the birth of man. In another aspect it is responsible for his death. Thus in one aspect he is the creator and in the other aspect he is the destroyer. The brave Asuras have not been killed by Kalika and the other Devis. Time has been responsible for their deaths. I will reiterate that time is not in favour of the Asuras and is especially inopportune for you. Wisdom would suggest that you should not jump into the fray recklessly. Instead, you should wait. If necessary you should go to *Patal Lok* and when the time is opportune for you, take steps to re-establish yourself. This is my sincere advice to you. However, you may do as you deem best." Shumbha heard out the old general and then said, "I do not love life as much as you seem to suggest. How can I run away after the death of my brother and my ministers. I know that time controls every thing. Since every one's life and death is controlled by time why should I get unduly worried about what lies in store for me. Whoever is born must die. The Devas, Indra and even Brahma will die. Similarly, the sun, the moon, the earth will all die. When my time comes I shall die too. However, why should I start torturing myself now by thinking about my death at some time in the future. Instead, I think what I should do is to take steps to see that whatever respect and fame I have earned does not get diluted by any display of weakness on my part. Therefore, I shall go to war against these women and let whatever is fated for me happen." So saying Shumbha ordered his servants to prepare his chariot and directed his generals to mobilise the army so that they could march at short notice.

Shumbha's chariot was readied very quickly and he moved to the battle field at the head of a huge army. When he reached the battleground he found Kaushiki sitting astride her lion dressed in all her

finery. She looked dazzlingly beautiful. All the Devas were standing in the sky and worshipping her by singing paens in her praise and showering rare flowers on her. Shumbha was stunned by her beauty and her sheer magnificence. However, he soon collected his wits and approaching Kaushiki addressed her thus, "Devi, are you ready for battle? However, before we commence hostilities I would like to point out that you are not thinking properly. Fighting armed battles does not behove ladies. Beautiful ladies use their glances as arrows and their eyebrows as bows to fight battles. Their soft and melodious voices are as effective as the roaring of lions in stupefying their targets. When they embellish their beauty with ornaments and perfume they can reduce their vicitims into blubbering idiots. Indeed, their actions and inactions are like a panoply of weapons. These are the weapons of ladies and they are so formidable that even wise and learned men surrender before their onslaught. Therefore, it is these weapons that beautiful ladies should wield. When ladies pick up the weapons of war they do not look pretty and fetching. In fact, such acts go against the very grain of the natural order of things. The delicate limbs of beautiful ladies are meant for being loved by men and not for being wounded or hurt by wielding weapons of war. Therefore, pretty lady, desist from such foolhardy things as going into battle. If, however, you must fight then please change your looks and shape so that you can look horrible and ugly. If you have huge pouting lips, crooked and long nails, a black complexion, a frightening mouth filled with uneven and sharp teeth, yellow eyes and long and knobby legs and utter abuses in a high pitched tone, then it will be easy to fight you. I cannot bear the thought of killing or injuring a thing of such unsurpassing beauty as you." The Goddess smiled contemptuously at Shumbha's words and said "Fool, you are babbling like an idiot because you are smitten by my looks. If it is only an ugly looking woman that you wish to fight with I shall fulfil this desire of yours too. Let Kalika fight with you. I will only watch the proceedings."

Kaushiki turned towards Kalika and in a sweet voice said, "Kalika, he only wants to fight with a woman who is ugly to look at. Do fulfil his desire and kill him in battle quickly". Kalika picked up her weapons and Shumbha attacked her as soon as she was ready. When Shumbha was unable to penetrate her defences he decided to go in for close combat. So, he left his chariot and picking up his club he rushed at Kalika. She, however, countered his blow and then counter attacked with her sword. Before Shumbha could take defensive action, she was successful in cutting off his left arm with a single blow. Shumbha, unmindful of the injury that he had suffered moved forward to attack her again. This time Kalika dismembered his right arm.Then she cut off his legs one by one and finally she decapitated him. Shumbha died. When the Devas saw Shumbha's headless and limbless torso lying life less on the ground they were overjoyed. They began to cheer the Goddess and simultaneously began to sing her praise. Kaushiki, Kalika and the other Devis acknowledged their worship and then vanished from the palace. Indra and the other Devas quickly re-established their sway over heaven and began to rule over things as before.

WAR BETWEEN DEVAS AND ASURAS AND ITS RESOLUTION BY THE GODDESS

In the hoary days in the past, a serious war broke out between the Devas and the Asuras. The Asuras were led by Hiranya Kaship and the Devas were led by Indra. This war lasted for a long time but neither side emerged victorious. Meanwhile Hiranya Kaship died and was succeeded by Prahlad. The war continued. After another hundred years of fighting, however, the Devas succeeded in defeating Prahlad and the Asuras. Prahlad then abdicated the throne in favour of Bali and left for the Gandhmadan mountain to perform austerities and prayers. Shortly thereafter, Bali also fell out with the Devas and hostilities broke out once again between the two sides. Indra conducted the war very efficiently and succeeded in defeating the Asuras for the second time.

When the Asuras lost the war for the second time they were demoralised and in desperation sought sanctuary in the Ashram of the sage Shukracharya who was the son of the famous saint Bhrigu. They pleaded with him to save them from the wrath of the Devas. Shukracharya was a kind person and agreed to help them with all kinds of *mantras* and medication. The Asuras were relieved. The matter was reported to the Devas by their spies who then began to debate the implication of this development. The Devas were aware that Shukracharya had mastered an unbelievable number

of *mantras* of enormous potency. So, they felt that if Shukracharya was able to impart the knowledge of his *mantras* to the Asuras, it would become extremely difficult to defeat them. They, therefore, concluded that offence was the best means of defence and before Shukracharya could teach his *mantras* to the Asuras they should attack them and kill as many of them as they could so that the numbers of the Asuras would dwindle substantially and the threat from them could become inconsequential.

Accordingly, the Devas launched a ferocious attack on the Asuras who could not withstand the ferocity of the attack and many of them were killed. The others ran for shelter to the Ashram of Shukracharya with the Devas hotly chasing them. When Shukracharya saw the Asuras running for their lives with the Devas in hot pursuit, he immediately positioned himself between the Devas and the Asuras. Seeing that Shukracharya had come to the aid of the Asuras, the Devas gave up the pursuit and returned home. After the battle was over Shukracharya summoned all the Asuras and addressed them thus, " Listen, Brahma told me some time ago that Vishnu has been looking for an opportunity to kill the Asuras and is likely to eliminate a large number of them very shortly. This means that there is grave danger to all of you. Even though I know an enormous number of *mantras*, I do not think my knowledge and command of the *mantras* is enough to save you from Vishnu. I have, therefore, decided that I will go and pray to "Shankar" and entreat him to teach me the relevant mantras. Once I have mastered them, I will come back and teach them to you. Thereafter, you will never have to fear the Devas." Shukracharya's words caused enormous consternation amongst the Asuras. "Sir, we have already lost the war. Most of our strong and brave generals are dead. Those of us who have survived cannot withstand the might of the Devas. So, how are we going to survive during the period you are away," they chorused. "You have no choice but to wait till I return after mastering the relevant *mantras*," replied Shukracharya. He then advised the Asuras to adjust to the changed scenario so that they could survive in the intervening period. "Wise people do not hesitate from serving even the enemy if they visualise that such conduct will strengthen their position in future and help them to avenge themselves upon their victors later," said Shukracharya. "Therefore, be clever and go and plead before the Devas so that you are able to await my return with your lives intact. As soon as I return after mastering the *mantras* we will once again wage war upon the Devas" concluded Shukracharya. He then departed for Mount Kailash, the abode of Shankar.

The Asuras, meanwhile, opened negotiations with the Devas. They convinced the Devas that they had renounced war and had become hermits who were interested only in prayers and spiritual advancement. The Devas were taken in by the earnestness of the Asuras and believing that the latter had truly renounced their war like ways returned home. The Asuras began to play act the role of hermits while waiting for the return of Shukracharya.

In the meanwhile, Shukracharya reached Mount Kailash and bowed before Shankar. "What brings you here," asked Shankar. "Lord," replied Shukracharya, "I wish to master those mantras which Brihaspati, the *Guru* of the Devas does not know. I am making this endeavour in order to ensure the defeat of the Devas at the hands of the Asuras." Shankar thought to himself, "This Shukracharya is the teacher of the Asuras who wish to defeat the Devas, but the protection of the Devas is my responsibility. So, what should I do" ? After some time he decided to prescribe a very difficult fast for the sage. "Keep your head bowed for one thousand years, breathe as little as you can and whenever you do breathe, ensure that you inhale only a miniscule quantity of smoke and not pure air. Take shallow breaths while you inhale and exhale the smoke. Renounce food and water and immerse yourself in me . If you are able to perform this fast successfully, then you will master the relevant *mantras*," ordered Shankar. "I accept, Lord," replied Shukracharya and began to prepare for undergoing the fast.

Shortly thereafter, the Devas learnt that Shukracharya was performing an incredibly difficult fast in order to master certain esoteric *mantras*. They also realised that the Asuras had befooled them by pretending that they had become hermits. They, therefore, decided to attack and kill all the Asuras while Shukracharya was involved in his prayers. When the Asuras saw the Devas coming at them with a large army they realised that the game was up. So they took to their heels in order to save themselves and ran for sanctuary to Shukracharya's mother. The Devas, however, followed them to the lady's Ashram and attacked them there. When Shukracharya's mother entreated the Devas not to do so, they paid no heed and continued to assault the Asuras. This annoyed the lady so much that she ordered *Nidra* to overpower the Devas. Immediately, the Devas who had been single mindedly pursuing their goal of killing the Asuras began to feel drowsy and powerless. Indra, the king of the Devas also could not remain impervious to the effect of the spell and began to feel drowsy. At this Vishnu intervened and carried Indra to safety. When Shukracharya's mother saw that Indra had escaped the effect of the spell, she threatened that she would swallow both Indra and Vishnu through the strength of her spiritual advancement. Indra was terrified and entreated Vishnu to kill the lady before she could carry out her threat. Vishnu complied and he beheaded Shukracharya's mother with his discus.

When the sage Bhrigu heard that his wife, the mother of Shukracharya, had been beheaded by Vishnu he was overcome by rage and sadness. He went to Vishnu and addressed him thus, "Vishnu, you know the difference between good and sinful actions. Inspite of this you have committed the heinous sin of killing my wife, an innocent Brahman lady. An innocent lady is deemed unkillable. You knew it, yet you have done it through your love for Indra. So, I am putting a curse on you. Since you have killed my wife, an innocent woman to help Indra, you will be reborn again and again upon

the earth from the womb of women". Then Bhrigu picked up the severed head of his wife and through his spiritual attainments rejoined it to her body. Life rushed back into the lady's body and she sat up as if she had woken up from sleep.

When Indra saw this strange sight of a dead woman being restored to life he became very worried. "On the one side sage Bhrigu is capable of reviving a dead person so easily," he thought, "and on the other side his son Shukracharya is praying so hard to master all kinds of esoteric *mantras*. I shudder to think of what he will do after he masters the *mantras* and even more what the father and son together would become capable of doing if they decided to pool their spiritual power." Indra thought hard and long about his predicament. He then called his daughter Jayanti and said, "Daughter, Shukracharya is a great sage. I have given you to him. So, go to him serve him and win him over. Do only those things which please him. I want you to be able to control him completely. It is only then that the fear which is gnawing at my heart will go away." Jayanti immediately went to Shukracharya's Ashram and found the sage immersed in his prayers. Quietly and efficiently Jayanti took over the responsibility of providing all assistance that was required by the sage in performing his prayers. However, not even once did she make any advances at the sage. Soon, Shukracharya became accustomed to her presence and began to accept it as a matter of course. After one thousand years of fasting and prayers by Shukracharya, Shankar was pleased. He then granted him the boon that Shukracharya desired. When Shankar had departed after granting the boon, Shukracharya turned towards Jayanti and said, "Oh, beautiful lady, who are you? Who is your father? What do you desire? Why have you taken the trouble of coming here? Do tell me. I am ready to do anything for you because I am pleased with your devotion." Jayanti smiled and said, "Oh sage, you can get the answer to all these questions through your spiritual power." Shukracharya replied, "Yes, I have come to know everything. Yet I would like you to express your desire categorically, because it is my duty to fulfil your desire." Jayanti then said, "Oh sage, I am Jayanti, the daughter of Indra, the lord of the Devas. My father has offered me to you. So, please fulfil me as a woman should be." Shukracharya thought for some time then said, "Jayanti, I will create such conditions that no one can see us and disturb us. Then you can live with me and do whatever your heart desires. We shall live thus for ten years." Then Shukracharya took Jayanti home and the two of them began to live together as man and wife. However, they were invisible to the rest of the world.

When the Asuras learnt that Shukracharya had mastered the esoteric mantras they were overjoyed and went to his house to meet him. However, they could not see him as a result of the spell that the sage had cast upon himself and Jayanti. The Asuras returned disappointed. Meanwhile, Indra called his *guru* Brihaspati for consultations. He told him how Shukracharya had hidden himself and Jayanti. Then Indra asked Brihaspati to assume the form of Shukracharya and go to the Asuras and create

confusion in their minds. Brihaspati agreed to do so. Assuming the form of Shukracharya, Brihaspati went to the Asuras and told them that he had returned after mastering the esoteric *mantras* and that he would soon impart the knowledge of these *mantras* to them. The Asuras were very happy. They were unable to perceive that the one who was pretending to be Shukracharya was in reality Brihaspati. Meanwhile, the period of ten years of togetherness that Shukracharya had promised Jayanti came to an end. So, Shukracharya took his leave from Jayanti and hurried to meet the Asuras so that he could share his new found knoweldge with them. However, he was astonished to see Brihaspati sitting amongst the Asuras in the garb of Shukracharya. "Greed is the fundamental cause of all sin. It is greed which fills the minds of people with evil thoughts. Greed is such an overriding force that it has made even Brihaspati, the *guru* of Devas and the repository of the Dharmshastras, embrace falsehood and indulge in sinful activity," thought Shukracharya. Annoyed with Brihaspati's treachery, Shukracharya decided to put things right. So he approached the Asuras and told them that the man who was claiming to be Shukracharya was in reality the imposter Brihaspati, the *guru* of the Devas, who had come among them to serve the cause of the Devas. He, therefore, urged them to reject the false guru and come back to his fold. Brihaspati, however, countered by saying that he was in reality the real Shukracharya and that the new entrant was the imposter Brihaspati. The Asuras did not know which one of the two they should believe. Then Brihaspati clinched the arugment by saying, "The one that you see standing before you is the imposter Brihaspati. He has come here in my form so that he could delude you into believing that he is the real Shukracharya and then cleverly take you down the path of defeat. I am the real Shukracharya who has been teaching you for the last ten years. I have learnt the special mantras from Shankar which I will now teach you and together we will vanquish the Devas. Therefore, drive away this imposter." The Asuras were taken in by the masterly performance of Brihaspati and accepted him as the real Shukracharya. All the efforts of the real Shukracharya to convince them to the contrary proved in vain. The Asuras berated the real Shukracharya for trying to fool them and sent him away. Shukracharya was furious. So, he put a curse on the Asuras "You have insulted me in spite of my telling you that I am your real *guru* and well wisher. Therefore, you will certainly be defeated in the forthcoming engagement with the Devas". Shukracharya then left the place. Brihaspati continued to stay with the Asuras for some time more in the form of Shukracharya so that he did not arouse any suspicion among them.When he considered the situation safe Brihaspati left the Asuras and went to Indra. He exultantly told him of all that had happened and how Shukracharya had put a curse on the Asuras. He then urged Indra to make preparations for waging war upon the Asuras.

The Devas quickly got ready for war and sallied forth. When the Asuras saw the Devas advancing to wage war they became very worried. They realised how they had been tricked by Brihaspati

and how at his prompting they had insulted their own *guru*, Shukracharya. However, the danger of a defeat at the hands of the Devas looming ahead of them, gave them the courage to go and face the wrath of Shukracharya. They, therefore, went to the *Ashram* of Shukracharya and stood in front of their *guru* with their hands folded and their heads bowed. Shukracharya saw them and in anger told them to go away as he did not wish to have anything to do with them. However, the Asuras begged forgiveness. Bali said, "Oh sage, we are like your children. We were taken in by Brihaspati's sweet words. We beg you to forgive us. If an offence is committed out of ignorance then the wise do not get angry over it. Therefore, Oh sage, please take us under your protection and forget your anger". Shukracharya's anger was assuaged and he forgave the Asuras. He then told them, "Listen, I will tell you somthing that Brahma once said. Brahma said, 'whatever has to happen shall happen. There is no one in the Universe who can prevent the destined from taking place'. Oh, Asuras, your power and strength has declined due to unfavourable circumstances. Therefore, you will be vanquished by the Devas and will have to go to Patal Lok for a while. However, time never remains still. Just as you ruled the earth for many centuries after vanquishing the Devas, similarly, now the Devas will rule for some time. Thereafter, the wheel will again turn a full circle and it will be your turn to rule once again. So do not lose heart." Bali understood the import of the advice of Shukracharya. He addressed the Asuras thus, "Comrades, should we go to war with the Devas or not? You have heard our *guru's* words regarding the circumstances being unfavourably inclined towards us. What should we do ?" The Asuras replied, "Oh king, we do not know what destiny is ? No one has seen destiny. No one knows where it lives ? So we do not care for destiny. We will fight and see what happens in the battle. We also have our guru, the sage Shukracharya, helping us. Therefore, kindly lead us in the fight against the Devas."

Thereafter, war between the two sides broke out. The war carried on for a hundred years. Shukracharya's new found knowledge helped the Asuras and they came out victorious in the war. Then Brihaspati advised Indra to pray to the Goddess and seek her intervention. Indra did as advised and prayed to the Goddess to come to the aid of the Devas. Pleased with the prayers of Indra, the Goddess appeared. She was sitting astride her lion. She blessed the Devas and promised to help them. Then the Goddess went to the place where the Asuras were celebrating their victory.

When the Asuras saw the Goddess they were thunder struck. They were suddenly reminded of the innumerable times the Goddess had vanquished and decimated the Asuras. The destruction of Madhu-Kaitabh, Mahishasura, Chanda-Munda, Shumbh-Nishumbha and the other Asura heroes by the Goddess flashed through their minds. They, therefore, concluded that the Goddess had come to destroy them also. This made them very frightened indeed! Bali then decided to approach the Goddess and persuade her to let the Asuras live. He went

forth and prostrated himself before the Goddess and said, "Oh mother, I acknowledge that you are the real creator of the Universe. I bow before you. You are known as the mother of the Devas and the Asuras. So, how can you discriminate between your children. Mothers do not discriminate between good and bad sons. However bad the Asuras may be yet they are your sons. Oh, Devi, if you analyse it carefully there is no difference between the Asuras and the Devas. The latter are as selfish and opportunistic as the former. Just as the Asuras are involved in matters relating to women, children and other materialistic things, similarly the Devas are also involved in their families. The Devas are known as the sons of sage Kashyap, so are the Asuras. Therefore, Oh mother, you should not make any distinction between the Devas and the Asuras who are in reality brothers. Since desire, anger and greed are present in all the creatures including the Devas and the Asuras, therefore, I think there is not much to distinguish one from the other. Both the Devas and the Asuras are familiar with the deeper aspects of spirituality but we keep fighting with each other due to our weakness for the pleasures of the world. Oh kind Mother, the Asuras, your other sons are lying prostrate before you. They have come to you for sanctuary. You may either embrace them or reject them." The Goddess smiled and said, "Oh Asuras, you have nothing to fear. Renounce your war like ways and go and live peacefully in *Patal Lok*. Wait there for an opportune time. Remember, it is only time which makes a person perform good or bad deeds. It is only for such people who conquer desire, greed and anger that time ceases to have any meaning. For all others time is omnipotent. Therefore, all of you should proceed to Patal Lok. I declare you all innocent. Now do as I have said." Bali and the Asuras then bowed their heads in acceptance and left for *Patal Lok* and the Devas also returned home finally victorious.

THE MANAGEMENT

THE STATE OF THINGS BEFORE THE TAKE OVER

I think it would be in order to give at this stage a brief description of the state of things at and enroute the Holy Shrine of Vaishno Devi Ji before the take over of its management by the new Board. A *kutcha* track led from Katra to the Holy Shrine. This had been constructed and was maintained by the State Public Works Department. Occasionally, the Department would fix some dressed stones to make a reasonable surface on the track at some places. However, since these were just placed on the ground without being properly grouted in cement mortar, they would come off and lie scattered around on the track. At places where the dressed stones did not come off, they would soon become polished and slippery through constant rubbing by the feet of pilgrims and the hooves of ponies and mules. Walking on these stretches of the track was quite hazardous, especially if they were wet. Such stretches of track were inter spersed with others where virtually nothing had been done as the surface was quite rocky and firm. Thus pilgrims were rarely, if ever, walking on a surface which was even and kind on the feet. Consequently, pilgrims walking with cuts and bruises or limping because of twisted ankles were not an uncommon sight on the track.

The funds for the maintenance of this track came out of the grants for Udhampur District. These were always inadequate. So, not much money would be spared for improving this track.

The State Government had carried electricity to the Shrine and the important stations enroute. However, the streetlights were the responsibility of the Dharmarth Trust. This organisation always complained that it was strapped for cash and was, therefore, unable to maintain the streetlights. Consequently, the track from Katra to Vaishno Devi Ji was very poorly lit and pilgrims who undertook the Yatra at night had to carry torches to light their way. This also meant that there was a very little load on the power supply system. Therefore, the Electricity Department did not feel the need for strengthening the lines carrying power or increasing or upgrading the electric sub-stations at and enroute the Shrine. In addition, the electric lines carrying power to the Shrine were not very strong. So they were unable to withstand the high velocity winds, which are common place on the mountain. As a result, there were frequent power interruptions.

There were virtually no arrangements for sanitation between Katra and the Holy Shrine. A few rickety tin sheds enclosed some toilet seats at Banganga, Adhkawari and Bhavan. Most of them were, however, broken down and in desperate need of repairs. They also invariably remained dirty as

Toilet sheds made of CGI sheets

there was neither sufficient water nor adequate staff available to man and clean them. There were no toilets available along the rest of the track. Therefore, it was common place to see people, especially, children easing themselves in the open by the side of the track. There were also no Safaikaramcharis to either clean the remaining portion of the track of mule and pony dung and other litter or even clean the areas around the shops at various stations. Consequently, a foul odour always permeated the atmosphere all along the track.

The sanitation and hygiene of the area was further sullied by the beggars who lived in tiny, filthy hovels all along the track. There were male and female beggars and their number was very large. They presented an ugly sight with their running sores, their dishevelled and unkempt appearance, their constant whining and their diseased bodies which they openly flaunted at the pilgrims to evoke their sympathy.

The arrangements for water supply were also very inadequate. There was hardly any piped water available on the track. The Public Health Engineering Department had tapped a spring about four kilometres from Adhkawari and its water was brought through pipes and was used for meeting the requirements of Adhkawari. At other places along the track *Chhabils* had been set up by charitable organisations and devotees to provide drinking water to the pilgrims who travelled to the Shrine. Water was brought to the Chhabils on head loads and offered to the thirsty

Chhabil

and weary pilgrims. At Vaishno Devi Ji some rudimentary drinking water facilities had been set up by the Dharmarth Trust which lifted water from a nallah flowing adjacent to the Shrine. However, the water supply available at the Shrine could cater to the requirements of only a thousand pilgrims or so in a day.

There were no shelters for the pilgrims on the track. Once the pilgrim embarked on the Yatra from Katra he or she was at the mercy of the elements. There was no protection against the hot sun in the summer or the torrential rain during the monsoons or the snow during winters. Besides, rain and snow further complicated matters by turning the track into a slippery and hazardous slush.

The area ecompassing the *Bhawan* was, however, the worst of all. As one approached the Bhawan the track leading to it become narrower and narrower until finally it was barely 6-7 feet wide. Immediately on entering the Bhawan area the pilgrim encountered heaps of garbage littered all over the place and hordes of beggars artfully plying their trade. The pilgrims would have to carefully wend their way through this and the large number of ponies that would be standing diagonally on the track covering three fourths of its width. Since this area was *Kutcha* too, it was full of slush which resulted from the mud, mixing with water and human and animal waste that was lying all over. As the pilgrim proceeded further, he came upon rickety structures which housed some shops selling snacks, tea and food. These were dirty beyond imagination. Beyond the shops was the area known as the Bathing Ghat which was cramped by the existence of a shop selling *Bhaint* and *Prashad.*

The main *Dharamshala* at the Bhavan was the Shakti Bhavan which had been constructed by a group of philanthropists. Its management had subsequently been take over by the Dharmarth Trust. When I entered Shakti Bhawan for the first time, the thought that immediately flashed through my mind was that if hell could be said to exist on earth then Shakti Bhavan could qualify for that dubious distinction. The walls of this building were green with slime which had grown with the passage of time due to the wetness oozing out of the walls. Its corridors were full of water which seemed to be leaking from every where. The rooms were dingy and claustrophobic. The electric wiring seemed to be missing and a general air of solvenliness seemed to be every where. The two other *Dharmshallas* available for pilgrims were in a relatively better shape although the flooring, electrification and painting of these building too left much to be desired. Besides, virtually no functional toilets existed in any Dharamshalla. In fact, the toilets were housed in a few ugly tin structures which were euphemistically called "ever clean toilets". The fact was that they were never clean and stank to high heaven. The pilgrim who went for Darshan to

the holy Shrine had to negotiate this nightmarish landscape before he reached the sanctum sanctorum.

The situation was further confounded by the plethora of agencies who were supposedly involved with managing the pilgrimage : the *Dharmarth Trust, the Baridaars* and the State Government. There was a chaotic diffusion of responsibilities. None of the agencies displayed any keenness to better the lot of the pilgrim. Instead, they blamed one another. The Dharmarth Trust alleged that the Baridaars took away all the offerings. The Baridaars, on the other hand, accused the Dharmarth Trust of using large parts of the money received by it as rent from the shops and income received from the land owned by it on purposes other than religious. The State Government did not take up too many schemes in the area on the ground that all the land from Katra to the Holy Cave was owned by Mata Vaishno Devi Ji and managed by Dharmarth Trust and so the Trust had the major responsibility for providing funds for improving things in the area. Thus the overall position was extremely unsatisfactory and the pilgrim was the unlucky recipient of all the mismanagement that prevailed at and enroute the Holy Shrine of Vaishno Devi Ji.

THE TAKE OVER

Mr. Jagmohan became the Governor of Jammu and Kashmir during the middle of 1984. He went to Vaishno Devi Ji for Darshan for the first time in 1985. I accompanied him in my capacity as Dy. Commissioner, Udhampur. He walked the entire distance and was quite shocked at the appalling conditions and the mismanagement all along the track and at Vaishno Devi Ji. Thereafter, he visited the Holy Shrine on three more occasions.

While we were returning from Vaishno Devi Ji during the course of his fourth visit, he asked me whether things could not be improved. I replied that they could be improved if the State Government had the necessary will to do so, especially because it might adversely affect the vested interests of a number of influential people. He looked thoughtful. In March 1986, the Government headed by Mr. G. M. Shah fell because it lost the support of a majority of legislators. The State passed under Governor's Rule. On 30th August, 1986, the Governor passed Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine Act which authorised the takeover of the management and administration of the Holy Shrine of Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Ji by a statutory Board. I was instructed by the State Government, in my capacity as Deputy Commissioner, Udhampur, to effect the takeover of the Shrine on behalf of this Board.

Prior to that, on 28th August, 1986 I received a message at Udhampur, my headquarters, at 8.20 PM that I should reach Srinagar by 9 AM next day as the Governor wished to see me urgently. I left for Srinagar by road at 4 AM next morning. My driver was suffering from an eye infection and so I had to drive the car the entire way. When I met the Governor in the State Secretariat he asked me whether the takeover of the Shrine of Vaishno Devi Ji could be effected. I replied in the affirmative but also cautioned that it would be only possible if the State Government backed the decision to the hilt. He said that the necessary backing would be provided and that I should get ready to takeover the management of the Shrine within the next day or two *i.e.* 30th / 31st Aug. 1986. Chief Secretary of the State, Mr. B.K. Goswami, was present during this conversation. Since there was hardly any time left for making the arrangements, I left my official car at Srinagar and took the afternoon flight to Jammu. From

Jammu I rang up the Senior Superintendent of Police (SSP) Udhampur, the SDM Reasi, and the SDPO Reasi and asked them to meet me at Katra by 7 PM. Then I arranged for a car to take me to Katra and reached there at about 7 PM.

We held a meeting at police station, Katra, in which the SSP Udhampur, SDM Reasi, SDPO Reasi, Naib Tehsildar Katra and SHO Katra participated. I informed them of the Governor's decision. Thereafter, we began to plan how to effect the takeover smoothly. We identified the various points at Katra, Vaishno Devi Ji and enroute that would have to be covered to prevent the outbreak of violence or to contain the same in case it broke out. The exercise took us more than two hours. After finalising this and working out our requirement of additional police force my SSP left for Jammu to arrange the additional police force. I there after left for Udhampur to arrange the other manpower that would be required to manage the Yatra immediately after the takeover.

We had all agreed that our strategy had to be one where no one should suspect our intentions so that we could deploy our force and our staff as unobtrusively as possible. This was obviously quite difficult because of the very large number of people who were required to carry out the task. It was felt that it would be relatively easier to send non police personnel, because they could mingle with the pilgrims who were going to the Shrine. However, the police men in uniform would be very conspicuous. Therefore, a rumour was set afloat in the town that the family of the Prime Minister was coming for Darshan and therefore, elaborate security arrangements had to be made. The rumour gained currency because VIP movement between Katra and Vaishno Devi Ji was and is quite common. Therefore, we were able to move the police personnel to the Shrine without inviting too many comments. Since the operation had to be conducted in secrecy, therefore, the police personnel were also given the same story. However, a different story had to be told to the staff that was brought from Udhampur. I called my District Planning Officer at Udhampur and told him that I needed about forty men who would have to go with me from Udhampur to a place I would reveal later. He arranged forty of the best officers and officials in the District and they were brought to my office. They were told that they had been specially selected for their good work and as a reward were being taken on a picnic by the DC. They were also informed that boarding and lodging had been arranged for them. All of them were pleased and wanted to know where they would be taken. They were told that it was to be a surprise. This made them curious but they

kept quiet. By 1 PM all these persons alongwith a score of officers had been despatched from Udhampur to Katra in jeeps and cars. When they reached Katra, they were requested to proceed to Vaishno Devi Ji and wait for me there.

Once the officers/officials and the police personnel had been sent to Vaishno Devi Ji and other arrangements had been put in position, my SSP and I went and sat at the air strip at Katra in order to keep up the charade of the expected arrival by helicopter of the family of the Prime Minister.

A lot of work had been put in to anticipate all possible contingencies that could arise as a result of the takeover and remedial measures had been planned. The most important thing was that the yatra should not be disrupted under any circumstances. This meant that we should have the manpower to ensure that the pilgrims could have Darshan peacefully. This presupposed that violence should not be allowed to take place at the Holy Shrine. Besides, arrangements had to be made for collecting the offerings, keeping an account of the same and for regulating the flow of pilgrims into the Shrine. We could also not overlook the possibility that the shopkeepers might pull down their shutters in protest and thus deny food, milk etc. to the pilgrims. There was also the possibility that violence might break out at Katra as a result of which the shops might close and the transport system might get disrupted. We also had to ensure that the district head quarter town of Udhampur remained peaceful. Further, there was the possibility of violence breaking out at Jammu as a direct consequence of the takeover. However, since Jammu did not fall within my jurisdiction I left that problem for the Deputy Commissioner, Jammu, to handle.

Detailed instructions were given to the officers who were left behind at Udhampur as to how to deal with the law and order problem in case it arose. Similar instructions were also sent to the officers manning the sub-divisional head quarter town of Reasi. However, since the immediate problem was between Katra and Vaishno Devi Ji, the following measures were taken to deal with it :-

1) All strategic points at the Shrine were identified and deployment at each point was worked out in consultation with the SSP.

2) The required reserves of police force were worked out for containing possible trouble at Katra and the nearby areas.

3) Some *pujaris* were arranged from Jammu, who would help the pilgrims in having Darshan in case the pujaris working at the Shrine refused to perform their duty.

4) Officers/officials who would perform various duties like manning the precincts of the Shrine, collecting donations, maintaining accounts, dealing with the pilgrims'

complaints, arranging food and milk for the pilgrims in case the shopkeepers went on strike, arranging medical supplies for the pilgrims, cleaning up the area etc. were identified and nominated.

5) Officials who would regulate the flow of pilgrims at the Shrine were identified and nominated.

6) Detailed job charts were prepared for the officers who would be manning the various points so that they could be briefed properly and could help in a smooth takeover.

7) Cooks were arranged. They were despatched to Vaishno Devi Ji with instructions that they would have to prepare food for a very large number of people.

8) Utensils, stoves and provisions like rice, pulses, salt, condiments, ghee, oil, milk powder (to make milk for little children) etc. were arranged in sufficient quantity from Udhampur to last for four days and transported to Katra and also partly to Vaishno Devi Ji. These could have been purchased from the Katra Bazar too, but this was not done because we felt that this would have revealed our plans to the people. Stocks worth four days were arranged because it was expected that we should be able to overcome resistance, if any, from the shopkeepers within this period.

9) Donation boxes in which the donations would be put were arranged and ordered to be transported to Vaishno Devi Ji at night on the 31st August, 1986.

At 6 P.M. on 30th August 1986, I received a telephone call from the Divisional Commissioner, Jammu that the Governor had signed the Bill authorising the takeover of the management of the Shrine of Vaishno Devi Ji. As a consequence, the Bill had become an Act. He, therefore, advised that I should proceed to the Shrine in order to take over its management and administration on behalf of the Board which had been constituted under the new Act. I informed my S.S.P. of this development. After some discussion we decided to leave for the Shrine of Vaishno Devi Ji. We, therefore, spread the word that the programme of the Prime Minister's family had been postponed indefinitely and we left the airstrip and went to the Tourist Bungalow, Katra in order to brief the Officers who were to accompany us to the Shrine. However, by this time some respectable people of Katra had gathered at the Tourist Bungalow. They had come to enquire about the postponement of the visit of the Prime Minister's family and the possibility of the programme being revived in the near future. We politely informed them of our ignorance about any further programme. We also casually mentioned to each other within their hearing that since we had come all the way to Katra, it would be a pity if we returned to our Headquarters without going up to the Holy Shrine of Vaishno Devi Ji for Darshan. The local people present there endorsed our stand. So, after having a cup of tea with them (as we did

not wish to be seen to be in unseemly haste) we left Katra for Vaishno Devi Ji around 7 PM. Around 8.30 PM while we were approaching Adhkawari it began to rain heavily. Since we were not carrying any umbrellas we were thoroughly drenched by the time we reached Adhkawari. By that time the rain had further intensified, so we decided to wait for the weather to improve before we went any further as the track was likely to be very treacherous during the downpour.

The rain abated around 10 PM. We immediately resumed our journey. The sky was still overcast and the night was very dark. There were no lights to illuminate the track. Occasional flashes of lightning showed the mountain in a surrealistic and eerie light. After the glow of the lightning faded the night appeared even darker. We were, however, carrying torches to light our way. They helped. As suspected, the track had become extremely slippery and we had to tread very carefully to ensure that we did not slip and fall. After a lot of anxious moments we finally reached Vaishno Devi Ji around midnight. Many people noticed our arrival. In order to scotch any speculation as to why we had come along with so much police force especially since the visit of the Prime Minister's family was off, we agreed that we should have *Darshan* immediately and thereafter, retire to our rooms to give the impression that we had turned in for the night. This would help to allay the suspicion of any *Baridaar* or *Pujari* or shopkeeper who may have some apprehension about our arrival. However, before, I switched off the lights in my room I called the officers who had been brought from Udhampur, in groups of three and four, and informed them about the legislation passed by the Governor regarding the takeover of the management of Vaishno Devi Ji by a new Board. I also told them that we had all come here to effect the takeover smoothly. Then they were informed of the places they would have to man and the task each one of them was expected to perform when I announced the takeover of the Shrine on the Public Address System. They were also cautioned against speaking to any one about the proposed takeover to ensure that the element of surprise remained with us. A similar briefing was given by the SSP to the Police Officers. Everyone was also directed to be at his station by 2 AM and then wait for the final word announcing the takeover of the management of the Shrine of Vaishno Devi Ji on behalf of the new Board. All the people then retired to their respective rooms and switched off the lights pretending that we had turned in for the night.

At 2 AM I came out of my room, called the SSP and other officers and moved towards the Shrine which was situated at a distance of about 200 metres from where we had been resting. I told the SSP that he should allow only those pilgrims who were waiting in the main courtyard outside the holy cave to enter the Shrine and have *Darshan*. Thereafter, no one should be allowed to come in till the *Baridaars* had been evicted. I

also told him that he should follow the last pilgrim who entered the cave so that I would understand that no other pilgrim was behind him. I decided to go to the sanctum sanctorum and wait for the SSP there in order to ensure that the Baridaars did not play any mischief there. Meanwhile, our other officers and officials quietly moved into their assigned places around 2 AM. They were now poised to take over the running of the affairs at the shrine the moment I announced the takeover on the public address system. Thereafter, the SSP moved to the main courtyard outside the holy shrine and I went to the sanctum sanctorum through the exit route.

The *Baridaars* who were sitting at the sanctum sanctorum were surprised to see me again but did not offer any comment. I waited. Pilgrims continued to have *Darshan*. After about ten minutes the SSP came in and signalled that there were no more pilgrims in the cave. I then informed the *Baridaars* present in the cave about the takeover of the management and administration of the Shrine from the *Baridaars* and the *Dharmarth* Trust by an autonomous Board which had been constituted under an Act. The *Baridaars* appeared to be thunder struck, but could not offer any resistance as by now a few other officers had also entered the Shrine. There had been five *Baridaars* sitting at that time at the sanctum sanctorum. In addition, there had been two *pujaris* who had been helping the pilgrims in having Darshan. A quick inventory of the ornaments was made. It was decided that a detailed inventory would be made at the time of morning *Aarti* when the Darshans were stopped every day for the morning ablutions of the Goddess and a change of attire for Her.

The *Baridaars* were then escorted outside the cave. Thereafter, leaving the others in the holy Cave, I went out and announced on the public address system that the management of the Holy Shrine had been taken over on behalf of a new Board which had been constituted under an Act of the Governor of Jammu and Kashmir. The pilgrims who were waiting for *Darshan* cheered happily. The time was 2.40 AM and the day was 31st August 1986.

The *Darshan* were then resumed immediately and I joined the other officers in the sanctum sanctorum. The *pujaris* inside the Shrine had agreed to continue to perform their duty till the morning *Aarti* and this arrangement was allowed to continue. The various officers and police personnel had earlier moved into their designated areas as soon as the announcement about the takeover was made on the loudspeakers. After making satisfactory arrangements inside the sanctum sanctorum, the SSP and I continued to conduct rounds of different points all through the remaining hours of the night to ensure that nothing untoward happened. The morning *Aarti* started at 7 AM. While the *pujaris* performed the tasks of ritual bathing and change of attire of the Holy Pindies,

an inventory of the items inside the Holy Shrine was made and signed by all those who were present. The next day was spent in hectic negotiations with various groups of people working at the Shrine. The *pujaris* were called first and offered employment under the Board on fixed salaries. After protracted negotiations, they rejected the proposal. The *Baridaars*, of course, had already been evicted from the Shrine and there was no question of negotiating with them. The employees belonging to various organisations working at Vaishno Devi Ji were contacted and informed that if they continued to work for the new Board their terms and conditions of service would be improved considerably. Most of the employees of the various organisations agreed to do so. A few preferred to leave.

AGITATION LAUNCHED BY THE BARIDAARS

The takeover of the management of the Shrine had proceeded smoothly. People in general came to know of it only after I had announced the take over. Prior to that on 30th Aug. 1986 the Kashmir Times, an English Daily newspaper published from Jammu, had carried a box item on the front page stating that the management of Vaishno Devi Ji was proposed to be taken over by the Government. However, not too much credence was given to this story by the general public.

On the morning of 31st August, the erstwhile *pujaris* turned down our offer for employment under the new Board and left enmass for Katra. The other *pujaris*, who had been brought from Jammu, thereafter took over the task of providing *Darshan*. Since their number was not very large an urgent request was sent to the Deputy Commissioner, Jammu to send as many more *pujaris* to Vaishno Devi Ji as he could. He obligingly sent another half a dozen of them. They helped us to overcome the problem of providing Darshan to the pilgrims round the clock.

The shopkeepers at Vaishno Devi ji were also persuaded to continue to ply their trade. As a result, we did not have to make arrangements for feeding the pilgrims through our resources. In fact, the shopkeepers announced a 15% rebate on the prices of all items as a gesture of their goodwill.

The staff of the various erstwhile organisations working at Vaishno Devi Ji like *Dharmarth* Trust, *Sewa Committee Baridaaran* etc. agreed to take up service under Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine Board once they learnt that the Shrine Board would improve their service conditions. Thus, tasks like providing blankets etc. to the pilgrims continued to be performed by them. However, the task of collecting donations at the sanctum sanctorum and counting them was entrusted to the various officers who had been brought from Udhampur. A mess was started for providing food to the officers and some of the cooks who had been arranged earlier and the rations that had been brought from Udhampur were utilised for this purpose. Obviously, these officers and officials could not be retained at Vaishno Devi Ji for a very long time, as it would adversely affect the main work entrusted to them by the Government. So, a system was devised whereby officers and officials were sent from Udhampur to Vaishno Devi Ji on rotation basis for a period of fifteen days at a time. This arrangement continued for a couple of months till the Shrine Board was able to put alternate arrangements in position. Meanwhile, the Government issued orders posting me as the Chief Executive Officer of the Shrine Board. I was to handle this charge in addition to my substantive charge of Dy. Commissioner, Udhampur.

After the *Baridaars* had been evicted from Vaishno Devi Ji and the erstwhile *pujaris* had also left enmass rejecting our offer of employment under the Shrine Board, they held meetings among themselves at Katra to determine the course of action they should adopt. They decided on a two pronged strategy to oppose the takeover. While on the one hand, they decided to challenge the validity of the Act passed by the Government in the Court of Law, on the other hand they decided to take the matter to the streets.

As far as the second course of action was concerned, they decided to mobilise people in and around Katra in the first instance, especially because a significant number of the erstwhile *Baridaars* and *pujaris* lived in this area. Thereafter, within a week of the takeover, they began to take out processions in the bazaars of Katra denouncing the takeover. However, they were unable to mobilise the general mass of people in Katra to come out in their support. So, the extent of their protest was, of necessity, limited. In spite of this, they continued to take out processions. Initially, we allowed the processions in the hope that after a few days, they would realise the futility of the processions and give them up. Instead, when they found that their processions and sloganeering were not having any impact, either on the Government or in motivating the residents of Katra to join their protest or in inflaming the passions of the pilgrims coming for the yatra, they began to get rowdy. Sometimes they would try to disrupt the yatra by obstructing the road or by manhandling anyone who tried to reason with them. These things continued for seven or eight days.

On the afternoon of 23rd September we received intelligence reports that these people proposed to take out a procession through the town and after reaching the bus stand at Katra they proposed to indulge in pelting of stones at the police station, the office of the tourism department and other Government buildings. In view of this, it was decided that the processionists should be prevented from entering the town so that they did not disrupt normal activity and hinder the yatra. These people used to assemble every afternoon at an open space just outside the town on the Katra-Tikri-Udhampur road. Once they had collected in a sufficiently large number they would take out a procession.

A police force was mobilised and my SSP and I reached the spot alongwith other officers. On reaching the place where these people had gathered we noticed that their number was unusually large and their tempers were high. The police force was deployed in front of them and some of our officers began to reason out with the older people among them about the folly of what they proposed to do in the town. While discussions were going on with the older people, the youngsters among them quickly placed their women folk in the front and then pushed against the policemen in order to clear a way for the processionists. We had enough force available to deal with them physically. However, we considered it imprudent to use force on a group

of people in which ladies and children were in the forefront as they were the ones who were likely to get injured, both when we used force and also when a stampede occurred as a result of our use of force. This, we felt would not only give a negative publicity to the State Government but also provide a rallying point for the agitationists and other groups of disgruntled elements. Therefore, we considered it expedient to fall back and regroup when the character of the procession had changed as we were confident it would. We reasoned that if the processionists were able to break through our barrier of human chain, the youngsters among them in their enthusiasm were likely to rush forward in order to give chase to the police and pelt stones at them. As a result the women and children would be left behind and we could then deal with the rowdy elements and be perfectly justified in using force against them.

The SSP ordered his men to fall back. As expected the crowd surged forward. Some among them picked up stones and threw them at the retreating policemen. The women and the children were soon overtaken by the inflamed youngsters in the crowd and they chased us for about 800 metres. We regrouped here and the crowd also stopped and started pelting stones at us earnestly. Tear smoke had no effect and nor did a *lathi* charge because they immediately dispersed in the lanes and began to pelt stones at us from different directions. This ding-dong continued for more than forty-five minutes and the crowd of younger people among them showed no signs of relenting. By this time, a few policemen had been injured in the stone pelting. When things showed no signs of abating it was decided that we should fire a few bullets in the air to frighten them away. However, this did not have any effect on the inflamed crowd. So, two bullets were fired low into the crowd. These hit two people, one on the foot and the other on the leg, and they fell down bleeding. When the crowd saw these two people lying on the ground bleeding, they ran helter-skelter and soon disappeared into the lanes. The two injured were quickly shifted to the Medical College, Jammu after they had been provided first aid at the Primary Health Centre at Katra so that they could get the best medical attention. Incidentally, the doctor at Katra told us that the injuries of the two people were not of a serious nature. Thereafter, a detailed report was sent to the Government for their information. In view of the facts that no serious injury had occurred as result of our action, nor any woman or child had been injured and also the fact that the inflamed crowd had forced us to resort to firing after many policemen had been injured, the incident did not spark off any serious controversy and the matter quickly faded out. Meanwhile, the taking out of the processions stopped and the yatra continued uninterrupted. The *Baridaars* and the *pujaris* now turned their attention to contesting the case in the court of law.

MR. JAGMOHAN'S VISIT AFTER THE TAKEOVER

The Governor, Mr. Jagmohan, came to Vaishno Devi Ji on the 2nd of September, 1986. He landed at the helipad at Sanji Chhat at 9 A.M. My SSP and I received him there. The Governor complimented us on the successful and smooth takeover of the management and then the entire party trooped up from the helipad to the small plateau of Sanji Chhat.

A large number of pilgrims were waiting at Sanji Chhat to meet the Governor as they were eager to ask him what he proposed to do next. As soon as he reached the Sanji Chhat plateau, he was greeted by a big *Jaikara*, *"Jai Mata Di"* and the pilgrims rushed to get close to him. A number of questions were put to him. "Why did the Government take over the Shrine?" "What did the Governor plan to do next?" "Would there be some improvement in the running of the affairs of the Shrine?" "How much time would it take?" A few suggestions were also made. "The place should be cleaned up." There should be more toilets." "There are no streetlights, no drinking water. Some thing should be done about this." "The beggars are a nuisance!" etc. Mr. Jagmohan heard them patiently and promised that things would improve. He then proceeded towards Vaishno Devi Ji.

On reaching Vaishno Devi Ji, Mr. Jagmohan went to the sanctum sanctorium to seek the blessings of the Goddess. Then he took a meeting of the officers where he directed that the track between Katra and Vaishno Devi Ji should be upgraded. The power supply system should be improved. Street lights should be set up. The entire shrine area should be cleaned up properly. New medical aid centres should be set up at a few more places along the track and work should commence on construction of additional toilets. The Governor also said that he would return to inspect the progress after a month. He assigned the task of monitoring, coordinating and handling the day to day work to me in my capacity as Deputy Commissioner of Udhampur. The Governor then returned to Sanji Chhat and took off on the helicopter.

After the departure of the Governor, work started at breakneck speed for rectifying whatever was possible within thirty days. Obviously everything could not be set right within thirty days. So, a few items like the track, water supply, power supply, beggars and environment were identified and taken up for effecting some improvement in the first instance.

Governor's visit after the takeover. The author is to the right of the Governor

The Public Works Department was directed to improve the track between Darshani Darwaza and Vaishno Devi Ji. They decided that the track would have a minimum width of eight feet and would be covered with cement tiles nine inches long, nine inches wide and two inches thick. Sites were selected for manufacturing the tiles. The department had to tile at least one half width of the entire length of the track within thirty days. They took up the work in earnest. The water supply (Public Health Engineering) department undertook some limited improvement work in hand. 15 steel tanks which were lying with them were installed by them along the track between Adhkawari and Banganga. They also purchased additional plastic tanks of different sizes and placed them at strategic points. All these tanks were connected with the existing supply at Adhkawari and Hathi-matha. Thus even though the overall availability of drinking water remained unsatisfactory, whatever water was available was made available for consumption at different locations. The electricity department took up the task of improving the power supply and illuminating the track properly. Material for improving the lines, setting up new sub-stations and for augmenting the existing ones was sent by the Department to the identified locations. Then came the specialist teams. They began to erect the poles, string the electric wires and set up the sub-stations. They worked methodically and

The track under construction

before the month was through they had finished the job. Thereafter, they fixed tube lights and bulbs on the poles. Consequently, not only did the track get well lit, but it also began to look very fetching at night. Medical aid centres were got opened through the aegis of the Red Cross, one each at Banganga and Sanji Chhat.

Besides, the existing dispensaries at Adhkawari and Vaishno Devi were provided additional resources. A subsidiary fire station was set up at Vaishno Devi. In addition, a full-fledged fire station was set up at Katra. All commercial hoardings along the route were removed to allow an uninterrupted view of the valley to the people all along the track and eliminate the commercialisation of the *yatra*. A campaign was also started to clean and paint the existing structures in order to improve the general look of the area.

The beggars were also removed from the track within the first one-month. There were all kinds of beggars between Katra and Vaishno Devi Ji. In Katra there were a lot of girls, both grown up and young, who openly begged for alms from the pilgrims. If the pilgrim did not oblige he ran the risk of being abused in the filthiest language or some times even being manhandled by these girls if he was alone. A little ahead of Katra, from Banganga onwards, one saw the professional beggars. There were lepers, hunch backs, blind beggars, lame beggars, a few who had other deformities and many

others with festering and running sores. A few of them were quite hale and hearty too. They lived in every nook and cranny on the hill along the track where they plied their trade. They artfully evoked the pity of the pilgrims by pleading, imploring, pestering and sometimes even threatening to invoke the wrath of the Gods on those who appeared less than keen to part with as much money as the beggars wanted. These beggars also inter married and had children who were also pushed into the same trade. They were one of the worst pollutants of the area. We suspected that they would not depart willingly. A major worry was that some of them may try to resist being evicted from the hill and get injured in the process. It was, therefore, decided that some tact should be used to deal with them. A police officer of the rank of Dy.S.P. was sent with a contingent of police force, some *safai Karamcharies*, a dozen palanqins, twenty horses and about forty labourers. The beggars were informed that the Shrine Board had set up a camp for them at Katra where they would be comfortably lodged for as long as they liked. Not only this, the Board had sent palanquins, horses, labourers etc. to help carry those who were ill or unable to walk; the labourers would also help to carry whatever belongings they possessed. The beggars grumbled a little bit but agreed to come down to the camp at Katra. By the third week of September we had succeeded in removing all the beggars from the track. A very large camp had been set up for the beggars along the Banganga stream. Most of the beggars had probably thought that after some time the officers would become lax and they could again manage to get back on the mountain and revert to their earlier routine. When this did not happen, they began to leave surreptitiously, usually after midnight. We knew what was happening, but preferred to turn a Nelson's eye as we were also interested in their leaving quietly, especially after they had turned down our offer to rehabilitate them in some of the Homes set up by the various State Governments for this purpose. There was, however, one beggar who did not take kindly to his being ousted from his place at Adhkawari. His name was Kali Dass and he and his wife were both blind. He filed a petition against the Asstt. Manager, Adhkawari, Mr. Shanker Singh, in the Supreme Court of India alleging that Mr. Shanker Singh had stolen Rs. 2000/-, a tin of *ghee* and a few other items from his hut while the police were taking him and his wife to Katra. The Shrine Board contested the petition. Ultimately the Supreme Court directed that since the Shrine Board was a charitable organisation, it should pay Kali Dass an amount of Rs. 5000/- as charity to help him look after himself and his blind wife. The orders of the Hon'ble Supreme Court were complied with and an amount of Rs. 5000/- was paid to Kali Dass. Thereafter, he and his wife departed and were never seen again.

DEVELOPMENT OF THE TRACK

The Governor left after saying that the track from Katra to Vaishno Devi Ji should be ready within one month. The task, however, was stupendous. It involved a lot of steps. Apart from determining the minimum width of the track, the thickness of the sub-surface and the kind of materials that should be used for surfacing the track, the required quantities of the material had to be procured; labour had to be arranged; a sufficient number of mules and ponies for transporting the material had to be arranged; since there was virtually no water available along the track, arrangements had to be made for carrying it from wherever it was available to the site of work; and most important of all, officers and officials who would execute the work had to be identified and posted.

Since the minimum width of the track, the thickness of the sub-surface and the kind of tiles that should be used to surface the track had already been finalized, we turned our attention to getting the tiles fabricated and making the geometrics of the track properly. It was agreed that storm water drains would be constructed all along the track and parapets and railings would be put up wherever they were required.

While the sample of the tile was under production, people were sent to other districts to arrange labour because a very large manpower would be required to execute this work as well as the tasks assigned to the other Departments.

Some people were also sent to far-off-places to arrange additional mules for transporting the material.

The samples of the tiles were ready on the eighth of September. They were tested for their strength and their looks and were approved. The manufacture of the sample had shown that each tile needed at least seven days for fabrication and curing. We had twenty-two days left in which more than thirteen lakh tiles had to be manufactured, cured, transported to the appropriate places, and fixed on the track. It was decided that the tiles would be manufactured at three places, Banganga *nallah* at Katra, Jhajjar *nallah*, twenty kilometres south of Katra and Mari *nallah*, thirty five kilometres north of Katra. These *nallahas* contained an abundance of bajri (small pebbles) which was mixed with cement to make the tiles. They also had sufficient open space for drying them and plenty of water for curing the tiles. Besides, they were connected with proper road links. At each of these places, the concerned officers were given the task of supplying five lakh tiles each by the twenty

Tiles being laid on the track

Resting place

eighth of September.

While the tiles were being manufactured, labour had been engaged all along the track to prepare the sub surface for the track. They used the stones that had been used earlier for pitching as their raw material. In addition, four sites along the track were selected as quarry sites to supplement the aggregate that would be available after breaking the earlier pitching material.

Meanwhile, the Public Works Department began to send cement for being stored at Various places along the track which would be required for fixing the tiles. The first batch of tiles was ready for use on the sixteenth of September. The tiles were sent up on mules, ponies and even on headloads. Each tile weighed between four to five kilograms. So a mule or a pony could carry only sixteen tiles at one time from one place to another and only five to six tiles could be carried as a headload by a labourer.

A very large contingent of masons was pressed into service to fix the tiles. Half width of the track was taken up for fixing the tiles at a time so that the movement of the pilgrims performing the yatra was not disrupted. Work would start early in the morning and carry on till late in the evening. Usually the labour worked for twelve hours every day. Work continued at this frantic pace through the remaining days of the month. The Governor came to inspect the progress of the work on the second of October. By then we had succeeded in laying the tiles on one half width of a substantial length of the track. At some places even the full width of the track had been tiled. Work on the remaining portion also continued till the end of November. A minor variation was done during the course of the execution. The engineers decided to experiment with bitumen on some portion. So, aggregate mixed with bitumen was laid on a stretch of two and a half kilometers from Sanji Chhat towards Vaishno Devi Ji and also on a few other stretches. Later, tiles were fixed on these portions of the track too as their performance was adjudged better than the performance of the bituminous surface.

The track that we had constructed between Darshani Darwaza and Vaishno Devi Ji had been designed to take a peak load of eight thousand pilgrims per day. However, due to the improvements made by the Board the number of pilgrims arriving at the Shrine began to increase steadily. About 13 lakh pilgrims visited the shrine in 1986. In 1992 their number went up to thirty five lakhs. Just as the over all figures of pilgrim arrivals were going up, similarly the peak rush figures of pilgrim arrivals were also going up. At the time of the takeover of the management of the Holy Shrine not more than seven thousand pilgrims could have Darshan in twenty four hours. After the takeover, we effected certain modifications and were able to provide Darshan to nine and a half thousand pilgrims per day. However, the construction of the second artificial tunnel to the sanctum sanctorum virtually revolutionized things. It enabled us to provide

Resting their tired limbs

Darshan to more than eighteen thousand pilgrims in twenty four hours.

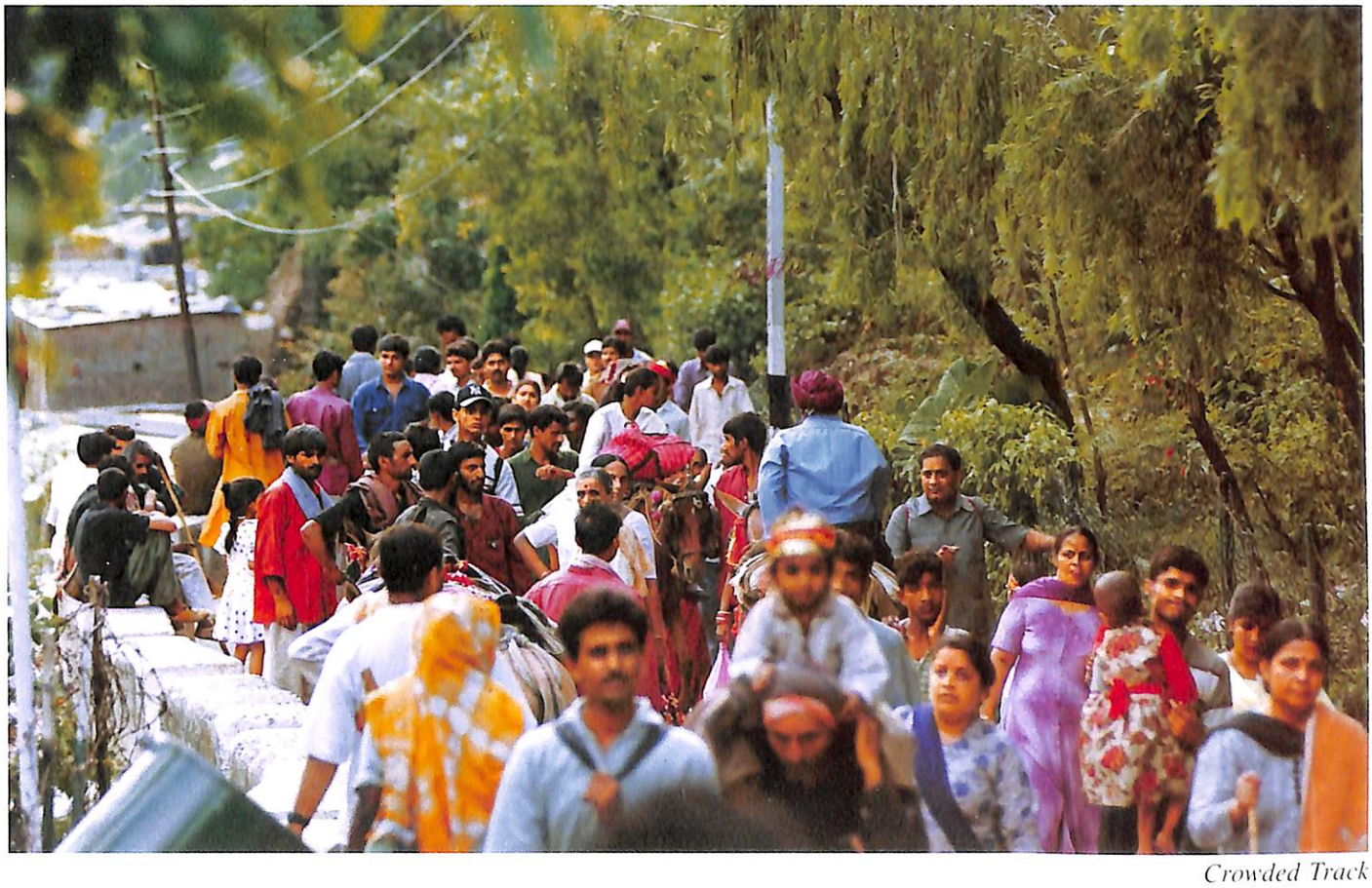
Obviously, if we could provide Darshan to eighteen thousand pilgrims in a day it stood to reason that we should permit up to eighteen thousand pilgrims to visit the Shrine on rush days. Thus the track which had been constructed to take care of a peak rush of eight thousand pilgrims per day had to cope with eighteen thousand pilgrims per day. It was unable to do so, and pedestrian traffic suffered the most. This was because the ponies and mules would keep moving on the track with scant regard for those who were walking on foot; and if the pilgrim was not quick enough or agile enough to move out of the way of the pony he was likely to come to grief.

The situation had to be rectified. The entire track was carefully surveyed once again to work out the various possibilities. The survey revealed that there was reasonable scope for widening the first six kilometers of the track between Darshani Darwaza and Adhkawari. However, there was virtually no scope for widening the stretch beyond Adhkawari because the entire area was very rocky and steep. Additional width could be hewn out of the rock only by using dynamite and blasting the rock. This was obviously not acceptable because it would disrupt the yatra and defeat the very purpose for which

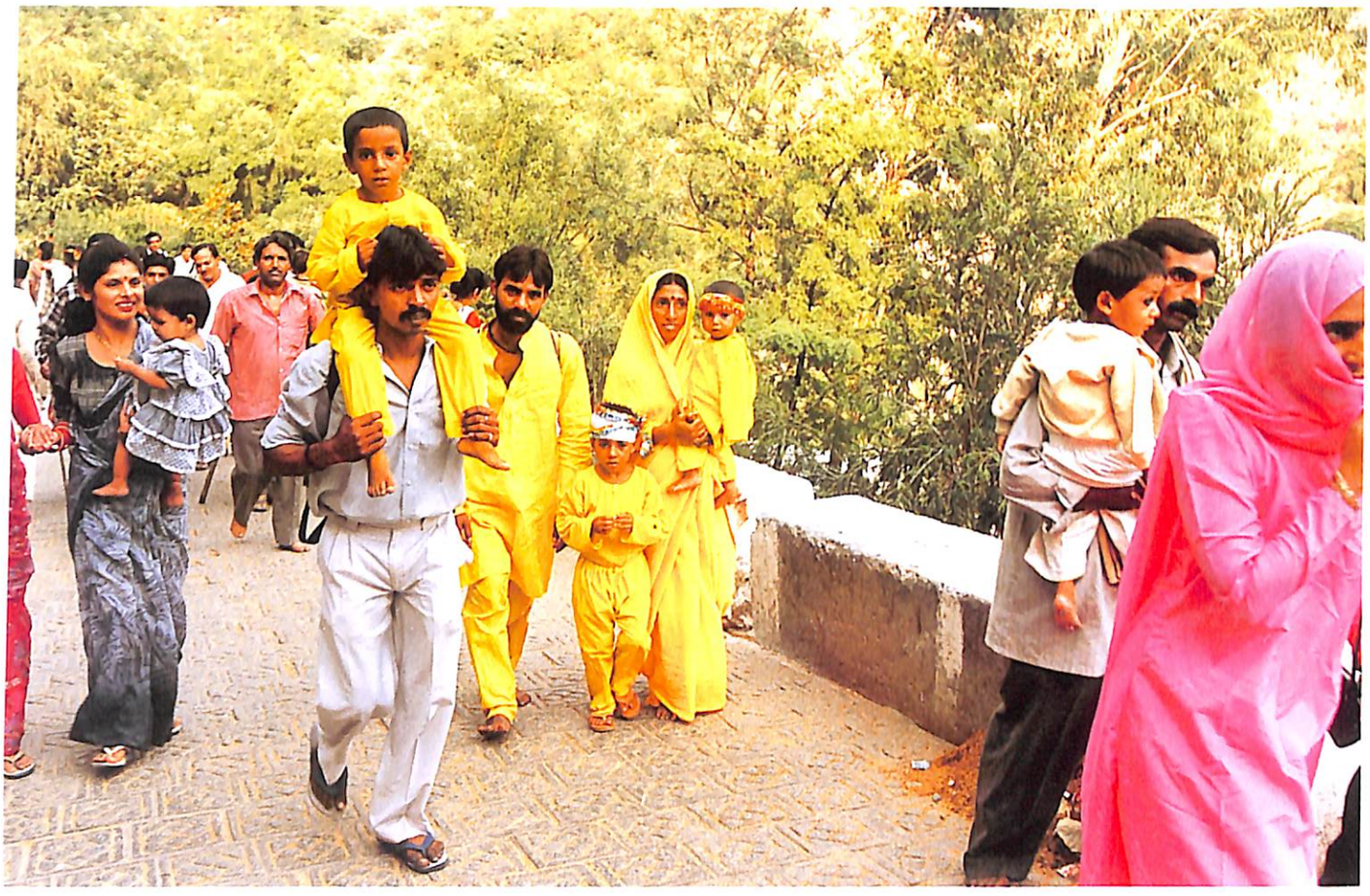
widening was proposed to be done. So, it was decided decided that while we would widen the track to a suitable width in the first six kilometres up to Adhkawari, we should make an alternate track between Adhkawari and Vaishno Devi Ji for the convenience of the pilgrims.

It was decided that the stretch between Darshani Darwaza and Adhkawari should have a minimum width of eighteen feet and work was started. Most of the work of widening was complete by 1997.

The construction of a new pony track between Adhkawari and Vaishno Devi Ji was, however, a different cup of tea altogether. The entire stretch was rocky and extremely precipitous. So, it was obvious that the rocks would have to be blasted with dynamite to cut a path through them. However, we could not resort to uncontrolled blasting to make our task easier due to two reasons. The first was that we did not know what kind of adverse impact explosions of high intensity would have on the safety of the holy cave because the shock waves would radiate all around from the place of explosion and we did not know how far the effect of the radiated shock waves would travel. The second was the fact that at most places the alignment that had been worked out for the alternate track passed directly below the existing track between Adhkawari and Vaishno Devi Ji. The apprehension was that uncontrolled blasting could threaten the stability of even the existing track and thus jeopardise the entire yatra.



Crowded Track



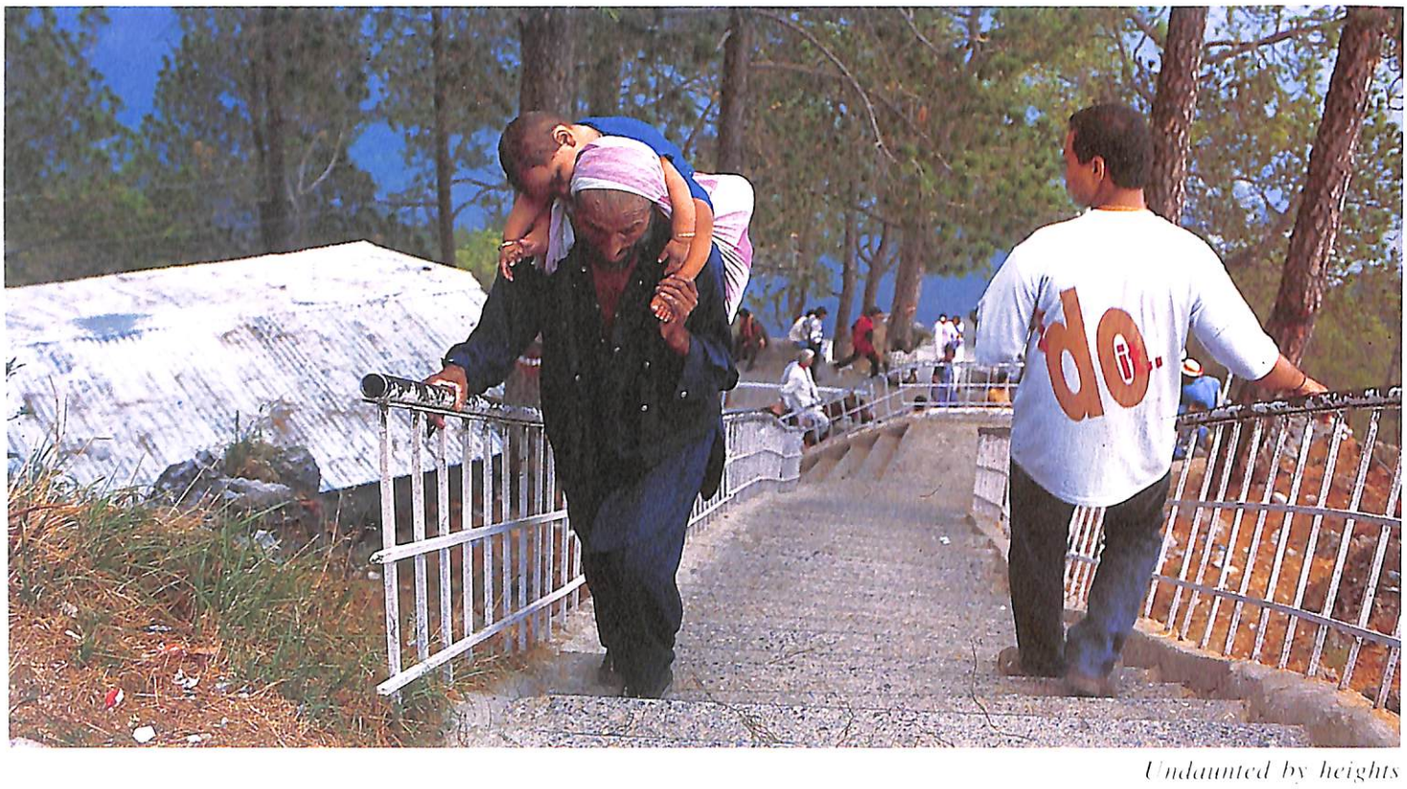
Devotees

Pensive mood

The steps

Shelter Sheds

The winding track



Undaunted by heights

Therefore, it was decided that very small quantities of explosives would be detonated carefully so that while they did succeed in breaking the rocks, albeit slowly, they would not threaten the stability of either the main track or the holy cave. Of course, this presupposed that the progress on the work would be slow, but that could not be helped.

The existing track between Adhkwari and Vaishno Devi Ji was very poorly planned. It was very steep between Adhkawari and Sanji Chhat. In fact, the track climbed from 4200 feet (Adhkawari) to 5870 feet (Sanji Chhat) over only three and a half kilometers or roughly 550 feet over every kilometer. This was very steep indeed ! Then after traversing over an almost flat stretch for two kilometers the track dipped suddenly and fell down by 670 feet to 5200 feet in the last half a kilometer to the Shrine. Obviously, this was bad planning. If Adhkawari was at 4200 feet and the holy shrine was at 5200 feet then the pilgrims should be made to climb only 1000 feet from Adhkawari and the climb should be so designed that he would be moving over a gradually ascending gradient all through the remaining six kilometers which meant roughly 170 feet over every kilometer and not the way it was at present with steep climbs and steep descents. A survey was carried out with these statistics in mind. An appropriate alignment was worked out and the width of the track was fixed at fourteen feet.

After these ground rules had been decided, work was started on the alternate track. All the work on the alternate track had also to be carried out manually. No heavy equipment like bulldozers, tractors, dumpers etc. could be used due to the absence of a motorable road up to Adhkawari. So, the track had to be literally hewn out of the mountain with almost bare hands. Only pick axes, shovels, iron rods, hammers, chisels etc. were used.

As the entire work was being done manually, progress depended primarily on the number of labourers that could be deployed on the work. The availability of labour was a seasonal affair. The labourers from the districts of Doda, Rajouri and Udhampur in J&K would come to work only from the middle of November and stay till the middle of March. A few of them would come during July and August. In between they would return home to carry out agricultural operations on their land. We tried to overcome the difficulty of seasonal availability of labour by trying to engage labour from Orissa, Madhya Pradesh and Bihar. However, we did not succeed in our efforts, because this labour was not ready to accept any restrictions on their eating and drinking. While we were not ready to permit them to consume meat or alcohol on the holy Trikuta mountain, they were not ready to accept such restrictions. So, finally we abandoned our plans for importing labour and contented ourselves with using the local labour which was available on a seasonal basis.

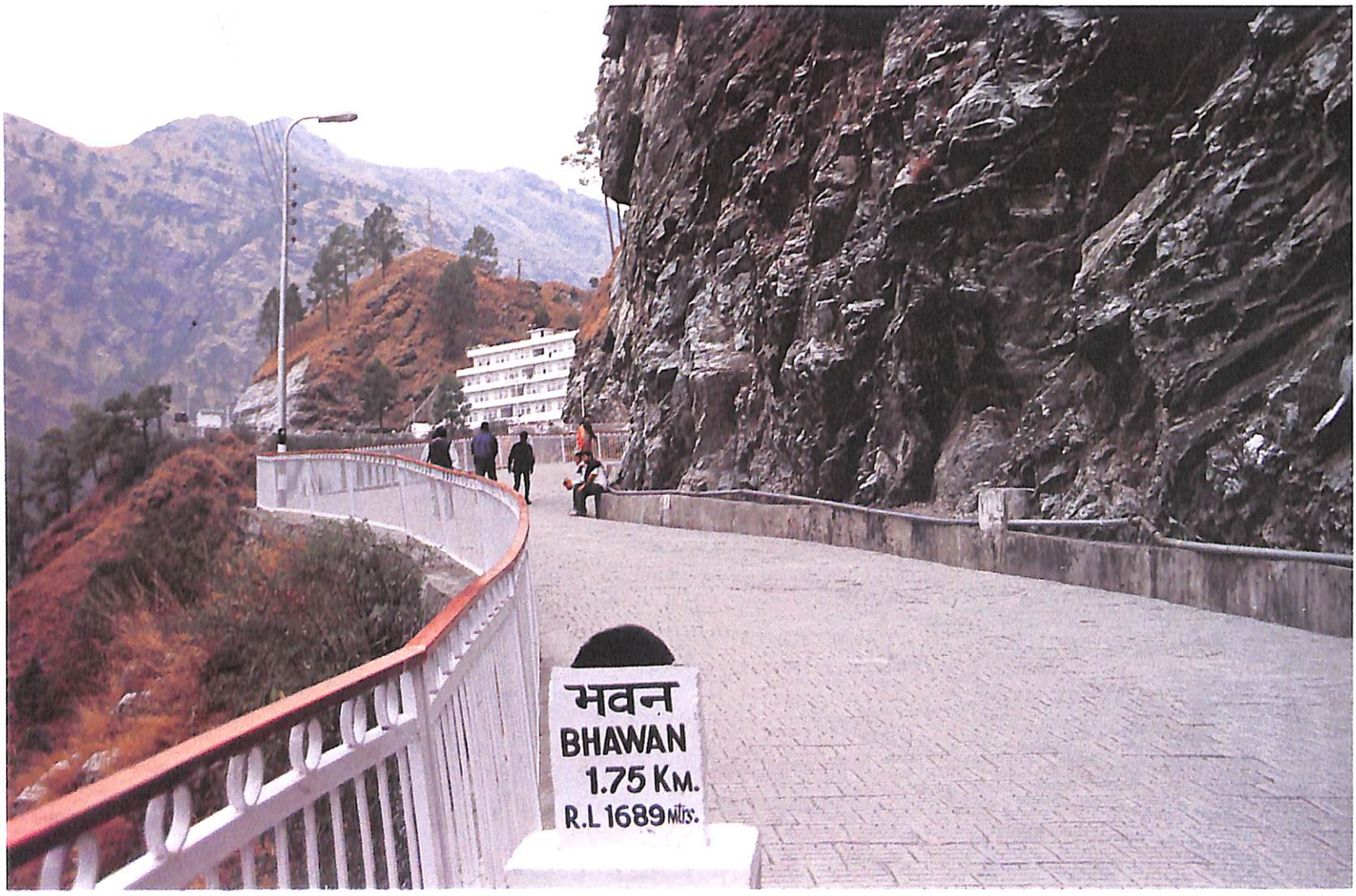
Slowly the track began to take shape. We had started work on this track in 1992 and we were able to achieve a width of 14 feet on most of the track only by the end of 1995.

Meanwhile, the number of pilgrims coming to Vaishno Devi Ji was increasing continuously. In 1995, their number crossed the forty lakh mark. On days of heavy rush there would be about twenty thousand pilgrims going up to the Shrine and another twenty thousand pilgrims,

who had been sent up to the Shrine a day earlier, returning from the Shrine. Thus there would be about forty thousand people moving on the track or waiting at stations enroute within a given time frame of twenty-four hours. Keeping in view this huge rush of pilgrims it was felt that the width of the alternate track should be increased to 18-20 feet. This meant that the completion of the work would get delayed. Nevertheless, it was decided to go ahead and widen the track further in order to take care of the continuously increasing yatra on a permanent basis.

It took one year and eight months more to attain a minimum width of 18-20 feet on the alternate track. Once this was done work was started on completing and commissioning the track. This meant that tiles had to be laid, storm water drains had to be constructed and parapets and railings had to be constructed to prevent people from falling off the hillside. Similarly, electric poles with sodium lights had to be erected and sub-stations had to be constructed for taking care of the additional load of power. Drinking water had to be made available at frequent intervals. Toilet blocks had to be constructed at regular intervals and water had to be arranged for keeping them clean. Cafetaria-cum-resting places had to be constructed where pilgrims could rest and relax. Finally, Shelters had to be constructed at a large number of places on the track to provide safety to the pilgrims from the sun, the rain, the snow and occasionally, falling stones.

The alternate track was thrown open for use in 1999. Thus, another facility was added for the convenience of the pilgrims going to Vaishno Devi Ji.



WATER SUPPLY

It has already been explained earlier that when the management of the Shrine was taken over by the Board, very little drinking water was available at and enroute the Shrine. Steps were initiated urgently to improve the situation. Additional funds were provided to the Department to set up temporary storage facilities all along the track. Thereafter, a detailed plan was drawn up to put the arrangements on a permanent and more satisfactory footing. This plan had four parts. Part one of the plan catered to the projected requirement of water for eight thousand people per day at Vaishno Devi Ji. Part two of the plan envisaged the strengthening of the infrastructure at Adhkawari so that additional water became available for distribution at various points below Adhkawari by gravity flow. Part three of the plan envisaged lifting the surplus water at Adhkawari to Sanji Chhat so that the area below Sanji Chhat and above Adhkawari could also be provided drinking water. Part four of the plan envisaged integrating the two schemes in such a manner that water could be carried to Sanji Chhat not only from Adhkawari but also from Vaishno Devi Ji via Bhairo Ghati so that in case of an emergency

A water cooler on the track

Adhkawari could be supplied water from Vaishno Devi Ji.

Work along these lines commenced in 1987. The scheme took two years to complete and cost more than Rupees eighty two lakhs. After the scheme was completed drinking water was available even at Bhairo Ghati and the four tiered plan for providing sufficient drinking water all along the track and at Vaishno Devi Ji had been successfully implemented.

However, our satisfaction was shortlived. Due to our success at effecting all round development the number of pilgrims going for Darshan to Vaishno Devi Ji every year shot up phenomenally and a tremendous strain was put on the infrastructure that had been created.

After the completion of the earlier scheme we had been able to provide 3.20 lakh gallons of water per day enroute and in the area of the Shrine on any day when the supply of electricity for operating our pumps was normal. However, since this quantity of water was found to be insufficient during the peak periods of rush it was decided to increase the availability of water at Bhawan by an additional 3 lakh gallons in order to meet the projected requirement of fifty lakh pilgrims per year.

Another scheme was drawn up for lifting more water from the same source. This scheme also envisaged pumping of water from Sui Nallah upto Bhairo Ghati in three stages and the construction of two more storage tanks one of 30,000 gallons capacity at Bhawan and another of 30,000 gallons capacity at Bhairo Ghati.

In addition, the new scheme envisaged the construction of four additional reservoirs along the track with a total capacity of 90,000 gallons which again meant that they would be able to supply 1.80 lakh gallons of additional water along the track between Sanji Chhat and Banganga. This would be over and above the existing capacity of 1 lakh gallons of water that was already available between Sanji Chhat and Banganga.

We were hopeful that with the completion of this scheme we would be able to meet our requirement of water for the pilgrims at Bhawan for the next few years i.e. up to 2000 AD. We also suspected that before that date was up we would have to sanction another scheme to further augment the availability of water in Bhawan area to take care of the ever increasing number of pilgrims.

SUPPLY OF ELECTRICITY

As has been indicated elsewhere, the Electricity Department had carried power from Katra to Vaishno Devi Ji quite some time ago. However, the system was not very stable and the power supply would often get disrupted. The system needed to be strengthened.

An assessment was made and the tasks that had to be performed were divided into three parts:

a) Immediate tasks

b) Short-term tasks

c) Medium / long-term tasks.

The immediate tasks were defined as those tasks that had to be completed within three months. The short-term tasks were defined as those that would require to be completed within twelve to eighteen months and the medium / long-term tasks were defined as those that could take more than thirty six months to complete. It was also understood that the requirement of power at and enroute Vaishno Devi Ji would keep mounting with time and the electricity department would have to keep planning for and providing the additional power as and when the necessity arose.

The immediate tasks comprised repairing the conductors (wires that carry power), repairing / replacing defective transformers, repairing defective chokes, starters etc. of tube lights, installing new tube lights and bulbs on the poles along the track for providing proper streetlight and painting the electric poles. The way this work was completed has been dealt with separately in another chapter.

The short term tasks included strengthening the conductors, reducing interruptions in power supply, adding electric sub-stations wherever required, inserting additional poles for improving the streetlight, replacing all wooden poles with steel tubular poles, installing control switches for switching on / off the street lights, replacement of the existing streetlight system on the track with high power sodium vapour lamps and installation of additional diesel generator sets.

Eight new sub-stations were constructed to improve the quality of power supply. Simultaneously, work was taken up on the replacement of the existing lines with a superior line between Katra and Adhkawari in the first phase and laying a new line from Vaishno Devi Ji to Sanji Chhat via Bhairo Ghati so that this area could also be electrified. A large number of wooden poles were replaced with steel tubular poles and additional poles were inserted in stretches where the distance between two poles was quite large.

The track at night

After the streetlight system had been improved it was discovered with dismay that the streetlights would remain lit the whole day, as the system did not provide for a method to switch them off. The electricity department devised a short cut solution to the problem. They began to switch off the entire system at 8 AM every morning. However, this solution was found to be very unsatisfactory. The electricity dapartment was persuaded to instal switches to switch on/off the streetlights. After this was got done our streetlight system became more efficient.

By this time, the availability of funds with the Shrine Board had improved and so it was decided that the entire track should be lit up with sodium vapour lamps. Suitable instructions were passed on to the electricity department. By the time the task was over almost 700 sodium vapour lamps had been installed on the track and the entire area was beautifully lit. The illumination provided by these bulbs was so much that it was visible from Jammu, which is fifty kilometres away. As a result of the brilliant light provided by these lamps, it became very easy and convenient for the pilgrims to travel on the track at night.

Large diesel generating sets were purchased and installed at Vaishno Devi Ji and Adhkawari to illuminate these places in the event of a power failure. All these steps helped to improve things a great deal.

The medium/long-term tasks included (i) Making an assessment of the existing requirement of power and then adding to it the projected requirement ten years hence. (ii) Constructing a main receiving station at Katra which could take care of this requirement as also the existing

Bhawan Bazar at night

and future requirement of Katra town and the surrounding areas. (iii) Constructing a main receiving station at Vaishno Devi Ji. (iv) Constructing the required number of sub-stations from Katra to the Shrine. (v) Providing an alternate 11 KV line between Katra and Vaishno Devi Ji in order to have a standby arrangement for supplying power to Vaishno Devi Ji in case one line carrying power to the Shrine failed. (vi) Working out a special dispensation for Vaishno Devi Ji so that it was exempted from normal curtailment of power schedules which were announced by the electricity department from time to time.

By 1987-88 Vaishno Devi Ji area was consuming 0.5 MW of power. The Shrine Board had projectd that by 1995 it would be consuming 5 MW of power in the Vaishno Devi Ji area. We had calculated our requirement of power on the basis of the number of streetlights installed, the connections provided to the various Dharamshalas, the innumerable electrical gadgets installed everywhere, the connections taken by the shopkeepers, the automatic laundry plants installed by the Shrine Board, the electrical equipment installed in our Bhojanalayas, the additional load of the room heaters, hot air blowers, geysers etc. and the running of the heavy duty motors for pumping water at Bhawan and Adhkawari. Besides, the additional power that would be needed when our new shopping complexes, hospital buildings and living accommodation were got ready was also added.

To begin with, a large number of sub-stations were constructed at various places so that the power supply would be smooth and uninterrupted.

The electricity department also set up a wireless communication link between Katra and the grid station at Jhajjar Kotli, twenty kilometres away so that in case of any interruption in power supply responsible officials at the two ends could communicate with each other and rectify matters. In addition, the electricity department strengthened the lines carrying power to Katra from Jhajjar Kotli.

On the persuasion of the Shrine Board, the electricity department also agreed to exempt Katra-Vaishno Devi Ji area from their general schedules of power curtailment. This was wonderful because it ensured that the pilgrims were not inconvenienced in any way.

Meanwhile, on the request of the Shrine Board, the electricity department took up the work of constructing a new 11 KV line between Katra and Bhawan. A new alignment was finalized and within a few months the line had been erected and charged. Our standby line for carrying power to Vaishno Devi Ji was ready. We heaved a sigh of relief because we knew that now the area of Vaishno Devi Ji would never be plunged into darkness unless there was a total system failure.

We, thereafter, requested the electricity department to construct their main receiving station at Katra and also construct a receiving station of suitable capacity at Vaishno Devi Ji. The electricity department acceded to our request and constructed a 2 x 5 MVA 33/11 KV sub-station at Katra and a 4 MVA receiving station at Vaishno Devi Ji.

SANITATION

One of the most difficult yet most satisfying task that we took in hand was the cleaning up of the entire track and the major stations enroute the Shrine. Earlier, the entire track from Katra to Vaishno Devi Ji had been *kaccha*. So, the refuse generated by mules, horses and humans would, with the passage of time, mingle with the dust and dirt of the track. It was never cleaned. Similarly, garbage and filth had been heaped up over the years and had become a part of the local scenery at all the stations enroute Bhawan. As a consequence, the atmosphere all over was permeated with a peculiarly offensive stench. The hapless pilgrim who trekked up the mountain could do little else except to put up with the situation. The problem became glaringly obvious when the work of laying tiles on the track commenced, because whatever litter fell on the tiled portion stood out prominently and would offend the senses. Something had to be done about it. So the work of keeping the area clean was broken up into components. It involved cleaning the track, cleaning the toilets, cleaning the stations and cleaning the rooms and dormitories at the stations. Then all the things that generated litter were identified. These were, in order of precedence, horses and mules, yatris, shops selling eatables and waste water. Thereafter, the items that would be needed for cleaning the various kinds of litter were identified. These were brooms, disinfectants, suction pumps, hand carts, dust bins, vacuum cleaners and most important of all the people who would do the cleaning.

It was calculated that each animal would on an average litter about two hundred and forty square metres on its journey from Katra to Bhawan and back. On peak days there were often about 3000 ponies and mules moving on the track. This meant that we had to clean over 7,20,000 square metres. If this was divided with 36000 square metres (12000 metres being the length of the track multiplied by three metres which was the width of the track) it meant that each square metre of the track would get littered about twenty times. As far as the toilets were concerned, it was worked out that each pilgrim on an average used the toilet six times during the journey. Therefore, if the pilgrimage on a day was 8000 people, the toilets had to be cleaned 48000 times. Apart from this the dormitories, the rooms, the corridors, the open spaces, the bathing ghats, the pony stands, the dispensaries, the shopping areas etc. had also to be cleaned all the time. The task was truly gigantic. However, we went about it methodically.

The entire track was divided into forty-eight sectors of 250 metres each. So, forty-eight safai

karamcharis were needed to keep the track clean in one shift of eight hours. Similarly we had to take into account twenty nine toilet blocks from Banganga to Vaishno Devi Ji by the time we began to plan our cleaning operations, because they had been constructed/repaired in the intervening period. Each toilet block required two safai karamcharis, one each to look after the gents and ladies sections respectively. So, fifty-eight safai karamcharis were needed to keep them clean in each shift of eight hours. As far as the stations enroute and the Shrine were concerned we worked out our requirement as thirty-five safai karamcharis in each shift. Thus 141 safai karamcharis were needed in one shift to keep the area clean. In addition a 20% leave reserve had to be built into our staff requirement because each employee of the Board was entitled to six days leave in a month in lieu of Sundays and holidays because these had been declared as working days. Consequently, 169 safai karamcharis were needed to keep the area reasonably clean in one shift. For two shifts we needed 338 safai karamcharis and if we wanted to run all the three shifts we needed 507 safai karamcharis.

Once we had worked out our manpower requirement we began to look around for people who could fit the bill. It was then that we realised for the first time how difficult it is to find safai karamcharis in sufficiently large numbers. They are just not available! We scoured the six districts which comprised the Jammu province and with very great difficulty we could lay our hands on two hundred odd safai karamcharis. We then decided to approach the Sulabh International, who had built up a reputation for good work in the field of sanitation, to man some of our toilet blocks. Sulabh International would, we hoped, bring additional safai karamcharis from outside the State and at the same time help us to upgrade our skill in the field of sanitation.

Sulabh International readily agreed to our request. They also sought permission for constructing a few more toilet blocks apart from maintaining some of the toilet blocks. Their request was accepted and a few sites were identified where they could take up the construction work. Sulabh brought additional manpower, some from Jammu out of their existing staff and many others from outside the State of J&K. They also introduced the system of charging money from the pilgrims who used the toilets. Initially we found it strange that people had to pay money for the use of the toilets. However, we continued with the system because it helped to keep the safai karmachari present at his duty station.

Meanwhile, we continued to look for more safai karamcharis. While doing so we encountered one more problem. Many of the safai karamcharis that were engaged turned out to be malingerers. As a result, their area would often remain dirty. To overcome this problem we introduced the system of elevating the better workers as head safai karamcharis who were made responsible for the cleanliness of

Toilet block

specified areas. This made a big difference. The head safai karamcharis were given a special uniform, a small allowance and some degree of control over the staff working under them and they were raring to go. Consequently, the general standard of cleanliness improved. We also took in hand the task of weeding out the undesirable elements from the work force and inducting fresh people in their place. Then some of the better safai karamcharis began to be sent back to their villages with instructions to bring back more people who could be inducted into the work force. They invariably brought back a few men and women who were ready to join us. As a result, gradually the strength of the safai karamcharis began to go up inspite of the weeding out that was going on. Meanwhile, the process of constructing additional toilet blocks at a large number of places along the track had been continuing. By the time the process was over the Board had set up forty-eight toilet blocks with four hundred and fifty seats between Katra and Vaishno Devi Ji including the stations which fell enroute. Subsequently, the Board also completed the widening and tiling of the track leading from Vaishno Devi Ji to Sanji Chhat via Bhairo temple which added an additional four kilometres to the track that had to be cleaned. Thus by the time the initial work was over in the first couple of years our requirement of staff for keeping the area clean had gone up to almost six hundred for three shifts. However, this number of safai karamcharis were just not available inspite of the best efforts of all concerned. Therefore, a conscious decision was taken that the work on the cleaning of the track and the toilets would be carried on for

only sixteen hours in a day. This reduced our requirement of staff for this wing by two hundred straightway, of course at the cost of compromising with the level of cleanliness that we were interested in maintaining!

It was decided that the cleaning operations would commence every morning at 6 AM and carry on for sixteen hours in two shifts of eight hours each. They would conclude at 10 PM every night. The reasons that prompted us to dispense with the night shift were two fold. First, there was the shortage of safai karamcharis and second, was the fact that on the whole the movement of the yatra after 11 PM was much less than during the day and the evenings. Besides, the litter on the track was less glaringly obvious under the street lights than it was in day light and we thought we could get away with some cutting of corners. The result of this decision was as predicted. The entire track would be littered with vast quantities of refuse by the time day broke and massive cleaning operations would have to be mounted every day to make the track look presentable. If the safai karamcharis were late in reporting for duty then it would appear as if the track had not been cleaned for days together. However, the problem of the toilets was far more grave. The toilets were used by the pilgrims irrespective of the time of the day. When the cleaning of the toilets ceased after 10 PM they became impossibly dirty within a few hours. Besides, even though the toilets that we had constructed had been connected to septic tanks, but the septic tanks did not have any soakage pits due to the terrain. Conseqently, the water that was discharged into the septic tanks did not get soaked into the earth and the tanks would get filled up very fast. In addition, the temperature in the Vaishno Devi area was never so high as would permit proper septic action to take place in quick time in order to disintegrate the effluent. Consequently, we were forced to pump out all the sewage and sullage from the septic tanks on to the hill side with the help of diesel pumps and then wait for nature to take care of the problem by converting it into manure over a period of time. However, in case it rained before the sun's heat could convert the human waste into manure then it would be washed down the hillside and go into the nallahs of the Trikuta mountain. This obviously was a very unsatisfactory arrangement. However, there was not much that we could do about altering the situation as there was no place to construct sewage treatment plants because the entire hill side had a very acute slope. So, we did the next best thing that was possible. We increased the size of the septic tanks so that they would take longer to get filled up. However, even this experiment was only moderately successful because the yatra began to increase immediately after the take over of the management of the area of the Holy Shrine. Consequently, the arrangement for the disposal of human effluent remained quite unsatisfactory. In fact, we were not able to

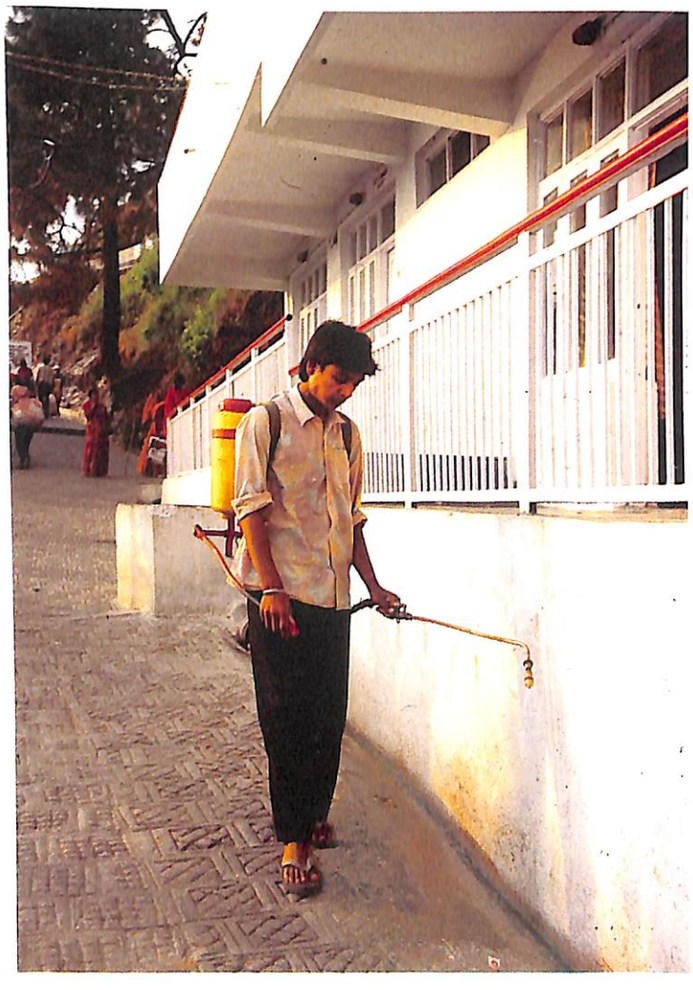
construct a sewage treatment plant even at Vaishno Devi Ji for a long time primarily due to the absence of satisfactory levels of slopes where the treatment plant could have been constructed.

Numerous permutations were tried to make the toilets function to their optimum level. Initially every toilet was equipped with a water tank that had a chain for flushing the toilet. However, the flushing mechanism would go out of order within a short time due to excessive use. Besides, the water tank also needed a minimum time for getting refilled. Very often this time was not available as the toilet was put to use almost immediately by the next pilgrim. Consequently, the toilet would often not get cleaned properly. In addition, there was also the problem of inadequate availability of water. Water was supplied to the various establishments twice a day, once in the morning and once in the evening. Very often, the storage tanks for the toilet blocks would get emptied much before the time for the second supply of water. At such times the toilet blocks would not only become dirty but would also start emitting extremely foul smell. Finally, after a lot of experimentation we arrived at the system where the safai karamcharis would flush away the waste by throwing a bucketful of water into the pot. This system, although not a modern system in as much as it necessitated the presence of a safai karamchari for cleaning the toilets, was still a more efficient system than the earlier one and proved reasonably successful.

Safai Karamcharis sprucing up the place

Sulabh International continued to do reasonably good work in the Vaishno Devi Ji area for some time. Unfortunately, after a couple of years we noticed a definite deterioration in their quality of work. When they were unable to rectify things inspite of repeated requests the Board was constrained to take over the maintenance of these toilets ftrom Sulabh International. Since then all the toilet blocks between Katra and the Holy Shrine of Mata Vaishno Devi Ji are being looked after and maintained by the Shrine Board.

A lot of mechanisation has been brought into the work of sanitation of various stations now. Apart from cleaning with brooms and disinfectants, sludge pumps, fogging machines, spray pumps, vacuum cleaners etc. are also used regularly for maintaining the cleanliness of the area.



FOOD AND REFRESHMENT UNITS

The distance from Darshani Darwaza to the Holy Shrine is twelve kilometres. The first two and a half kilometres of the track pass through land which belongs to private individuals. A fairly large number of shops had been set up by enterprising people in this area which sold every thing from food and snacks to trinkets and other minor bric-a-brac. However, beyond this area the track lay over land belonging to the Holy Shrine. When the Dharmarth Trust was managing this area they had set up a few shops for selling food etc. at Adhkawari, Sanji Chhat and Bhawan which had been leased out to private individuals on payment of annual rent. In addition, a few shops had been constructed at a few isolated spots in between these major points.

All these shops served a very important purpose. They provided food, snacks and hot and cold beverages to the pilgrims. However, they had one major shortcoming. They were dirty. In fact, there was a general air of slovenliness all around them. The sales boys and salesmen looked unkempt in their dirty clothes and equally dirty appearance. They had no sense of hygiene, either personal or social. There were no arrangements for keeping the area around the shops clean and presentable.

Initially we toyed with the idea of closing down these shops but eventually decided that we should concentrate our energies on more pressing matters like relaying of the track, improving electric and water supply etc. rather than setting up new shops. Therefore, we confined ourselves to trying to bring about some improvement in the running of the shops. We insisted on personal hygiene. The staff of all the shops had to bathe everyday. They had to get their nails and hair cut regularly. They had to wear clean clothes. They were checked by Doctors every month to ensure that they were not carrying any infectious diseases. The owners of the shops were made to keep the premises of the shops clean and serve the customers in clean crockery. However, it was an uphill battle. Even though these people understood the benefits of cleanliness, their heart was never in it. Besides, the shops were located at stations which were usually cold. So, activities like a daily bath were not very popular. After a careful consideration of all these factors and the fact that we believed that the pilgrims deserved a better deal, it was decided that the Shrine Board should set up a few refreshment units where the pilgrims would be given hygienically prepared and packed snacks

Alok

etc. The staff manning these refreshment units would be cleanly turned out. The items would be sold on a 'no profit no loss' basis. It was hoped that the setting up of these units would motivate the private shopkeepers to clean up their establishments and improve their own performance.

The refreshment units that we proposed to set up would also provide space for taking rest and shelter in case of inclement weather. The first such unit was proposed to be set up two kilometres short of Adhkawari. A three storey structure was constructed. The ground floor was for housing the staff, the first floor for keeping the supplies and the second floor which was at the road level was the refreshment-cum-shelter unit. A toilet and a drinking water point were also constructed quite close to the unit for the use of the pilgrims. The refreshment unit was equipped with a bottle cooler, a coffee machine, a pop-corn machine, light snacks like biscuits, potato chips etc., a music system for playing devotional music and a first aid kit. Torches, umbrellas etc. were also kept. These would be available to the pilgrims on payment of prescribed amounts.

The unit afforded a magnificent view of the area south of Katra and a cool breeze constantly blew through the unit because we had not obstructed the flow of wind by installing glass panes. Moulded furniture was placed in the premises so that pilgirms could sit if they so wished. We named the unit Sameer which in Sanskrit means breeze. It was immensely popular with the pilgrims.

The success of Sameer prompted us to set up such units at other places along the track. Thus came up Pushpanjali, Alok, Ambalika, Indra Prastha, Upvana, Vansthali, Chitrakoot, Amba, Panchhi and Om.

In addition, we set up kiosks at three places along the track. These were called Jalpan, Vandana and Chandra Bhaga.

By the beginning of 1988 we began to feel that the Board should also set up some restaurants. These would lay down some kind of standard which the shopkeepers could emulate and the pilgrims would have the choice of eating either at the Shrine Board's restaurant or in the privately run shops. It was also felt that a pilgrim should be able to have a hearty meal within Rs.7/- to 8/- per person in the restaurant that the Board proposed to set up.

After a lot of discussion it was agreed that the first restaurant should be opened at Vaishno Devi Ji in collaboration with the ITDC (India Tourism Development Corporation). The following reasons prompted us to approach the ITDC.

i) We were interested in setting up a restaurant that was run along professional lines.

ii) We wanted to associate with a group that possessed the expertise to run the venture.

iii) We were not interested in associating with a private group or individual.

Detailed discussions were then held with the representatives of ITDC. After protracted discussions an agreement was arrived at which envisaged that the Shrine Board would provide the structure for setting up the restaurant and also provide water supply, electricity and a telephone connection. The Shrine Board would also be responsible for the maintenance and upkeep of the restaurant as well as its security. The ITDC on the other hand, would provide the kitchen equipment, the staff and the technical expertise for running the restaurant.

The vegetarian restaurant became functional at Vaishno Devi Ji in the middle of 1988. The prices of items on sale, their quality and the service rendered by the staff were extremely satisfactory and were widely praised by the pilgrims visiting the Shrine. Meanwhile, an unexpected hitch arose. In order to ensure that the items sold in the restaurant were competitively priced, it was necessary that the Government should exmpt the restaurant from payment of sales tax. A request was made to the Government in this behalf. They examined the matter and informed us that they could give the exemption on sales tax only if the restaurant was run exclusively by the Shrine Board as it was a charitable organisation. No exemption, however, could be granted if the restaurant was run by the Board in partnership with any commercial agency.

After the ruling of the Government was received the matter was re-examined. We realised that if the restaurant paid sales tax on the various items it would cease to be competitive and then the purpose of opening it would be defeated. Therefore, the arrangement with the ITDC was terminated, although the staff provided by them was retained on deputation for some time.

Even after the arrangement with ITDC was terminated we were able to run the restaurant called 'Bhojanalaya' quite successfully. The success of our venture in this field prompted us to set up similar Bhojanalayas at all the important stations between Katra and Vaishno Devi Ji. The second such Bhojanalya was commissioned at Adhkawari in 1989. The third one was commissioned at Sanji Chhat in 1991. The fourth one was commissioned at Katra in 1992 and the fifth one was commissioned at Jammu in 1996. All the units were run by the Shrine Board. Indeed, we had to set up a full fledged catering wing to handle the running of the refreshment units and the Bhojanalayas due to the enormous turnover which these units were able to generate.

The setting up of the refreshment units and Bhojanalayas by the Shrine Board had a salutary affect on the private shopkeepers. There was a remarkable improvement in their cleanliness and service and the pilgrims now had the choice of buying their eatables from the units run by the Shrine Board or by the private shopkeepers.

AFFORESTATION

Ten thousand plants of different species were planted all along the track from Katra onwards within the first one month or so of the takeover of the management of the Shrine. However, thereafter, not much work was done in this behalf for a variety of reasons. A project for carrying out large scale afforestation of the Trikuta mountain was finally drawn up in 1993 and was sanctioned by the Government of India in 1994. The project envisaged afforestation of a part of the Trikuta mountain at a cost of Rs. 2.42 crores approximately. Out of this the Government of India agreed to provide Rs. two crores and the Shrine Board agreed to contribute the remaining amount of Rs. forty two lacs. The project was to be completed over a period of five years.

A total of 4900 hectares was selected for plantation. However, out of this the effective area available for treatment was worked out to be 3000 hectares only. The problems of the watershed were studied. Since the entire area was mountainous it obviously had steep to very steep slopes except in the lower reaches. The area was also rugged and the average elevation varied from 600 metres to 2200 metres above sea level. The elevation range of the area encompassed two main climatic zones viz. sub-tropical and sub-temperate. The entire area was found to be generally facing towards south and south-westerly directions and the hills were either bushy or barren.

There were three main streams in the area. The 'Banganga' and the 'Pei', both flowing into river Chenab and 'Juni' flowing into river Tawi. The upper reaches of Banganga stream drained almost one fourth of the area along the south and south-west direction and its tributaries flowed from east to west directions on its left flank and north to south-west directions on its right flank. The upper reaches of Pei drained another one fourth of the area. It had two main streams, one draining the area around the Holy Shrine of Vaishno Devi Ji and the other area lying west of the Holy Shrine. The Pei ran all through in north-westerly direction. The Juni drained the remaining half of the area of the watershed. It generally flowed along an easterly direction in the watershed.

The streams had, over a period of time, cut the area deeply into ravines and gorges which

resulted in the rain water rushing through at great speed and restricted the time available for it to penetrate into the soil.

Since the watershed was mountainous, the depth of the soil varied from very shallow on hill tops and the slopes to reasonably deep at the bottom of the valleys. At many places on the precipitous hill slopes excessive weathering had exposed the rock. The top soil was found mostly devoid of decomposed organic matter or bio mass. Besides, soil erosion had also decreased the nutrients substantially. The lower portions of the watershed were found to fall in the subtropical region with very hot summers. This area experienced heavy rainfall in monsoons during the months of July, August and September. During winter it became quite cold. The higher elevations in the range of 1500 metres to 2200 metres were cool in the summers and received good rainfall in the monsoons. They also received some snow and rain in winter between January and March. The general hydrological condition of the watershed was, however, found to be appalling. The main

source of water was the monsoon rains with high intensity and spread over a short period of time. Since there were only three main streams in the watershed with steep to very steep slopes, the surface storage condition was bad. Besides, there was hardly any vegetation to intercept the surface run off. The tributaries of the three main streams had seasonal flow and contributed their main discharge during the monsoons. However, the main streams were perennial.

Illicit felling, forest fires and excessive grazing over the years had resulted in scanty vegetation in the watershed. Many forest areas were, over a period of time, totally denuded so that the land could be used for cultivation. The forest fires in the watershed had led to the deterioration of soil ecology and resulted in poor quality of trees and scanty regeneration. On the upper reaches of the mountain, where the biotic impact had been much less, a poor quality of tree crop still existed. These areas had chir forests which were restricted to inner northern hill slopes. However, these chir-pine forests abruptly ended at steep cliffs and rocky out crops. There were no alpine pastures.

Large areas were found to be severely eroded. The people living in the area were found to be cultivating the slopes without any erosion control measures. This was accelarating the pace

of removal of top soil. Gully formation had taken place on a large scale and innumerable land slips existed. The matter was further complicated by the continuous and uncontrolled grazing and browsing by cattle which had rendered the ground barren and led to excessive run off and erosion. The cultivated portions were located mainly in the lower reaches. There were 18 large and small villages in and around the area which depended upon the mountain for fuel wood and fodder. These villages were inhabited by about fourteen thousand people and over 12000 cattle. In addition, there was a floating population of about 45 lakh pilgrims visiting the area annually and a large number of ponies and mules which were used for riding and carriage of goods for the pilgirms.

Once the problems had been identified, we began to plan for the solutions. We realised that we would have to adopt a multi-disciplinary approach. This would include measures for afforestation, soil and water conservation, control over grazing by cattle, protection of the forest from forest fires, illicit felling of trees and most important of all support of the villagers living in the watershed. We divided our objectives into short term and long term. The short term objectives included afforestation,

on priority, of the area around the Shrine and on both sides of the track leading from Katra to the Holy Shrine. Later on it was expanded to include afforestation of the area on both sides of the alternate track which began to be constructed between Adhkawari and Bhawan. Further, it incorporated soil and water conservation works along the track and in the areas around the shrine. The long term objectives included:

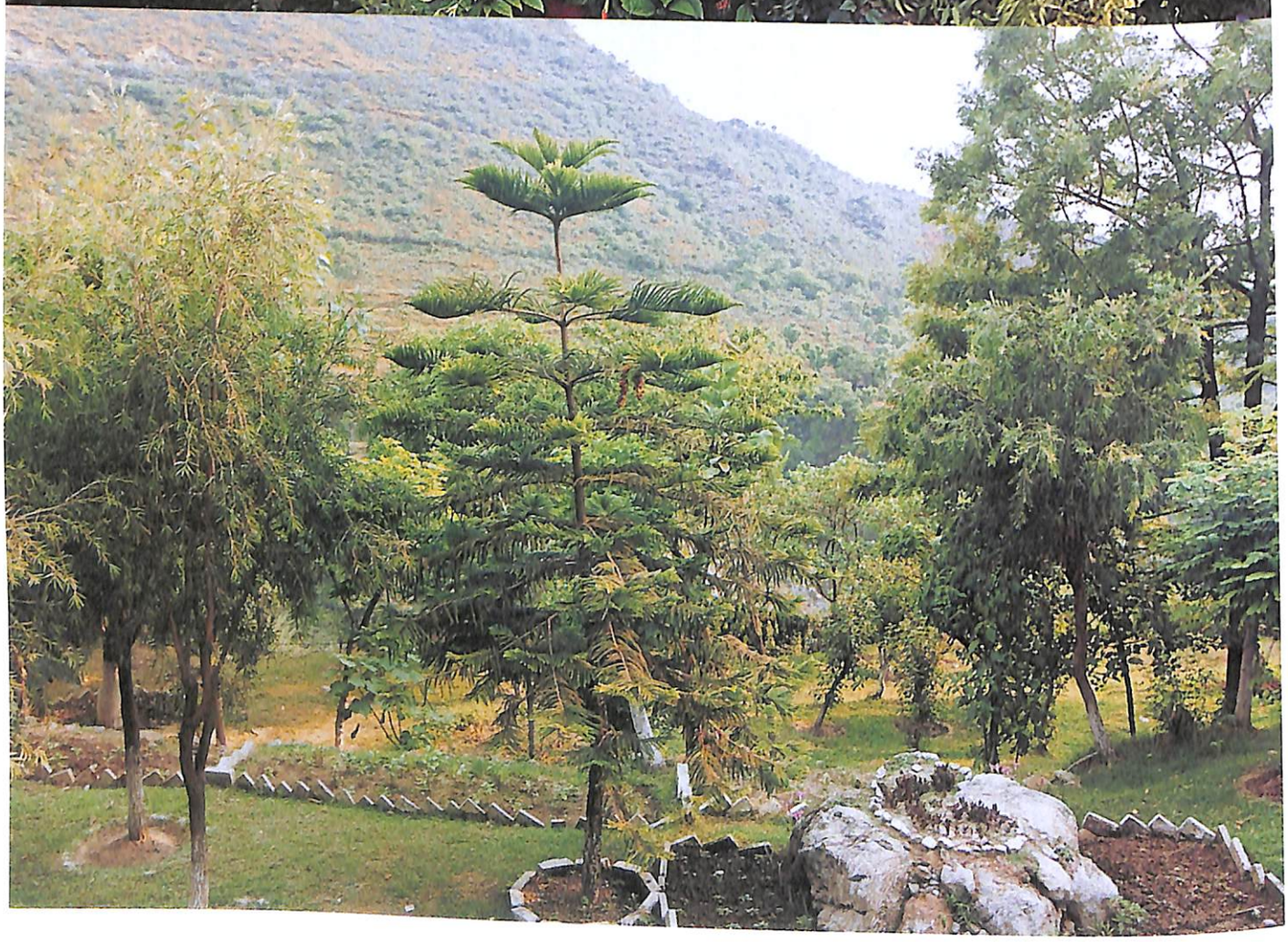
(i) conserving and developing all natural resources of the watershed viz. soil, water, flora and fauna;

(ii) replacing the goat population in the area with cattle population to eliminate browsing and to control grazing by cattle by encouraging stall feeding;

(iii) to cover the exposed and bare hill slopes with vegetation in order to improve the hydrological condition of the watershed;

(iv) to promote proper land use practices in the farm lands and reduce soil loss from cultivated lands;

(v) to reduce to the maximum extent possible the erosion caused by surface run off during heavy rains by constructing check dams and placing crates in deep gullies and slip zone areas and to control bank cutting by the three main streams in the watershed;



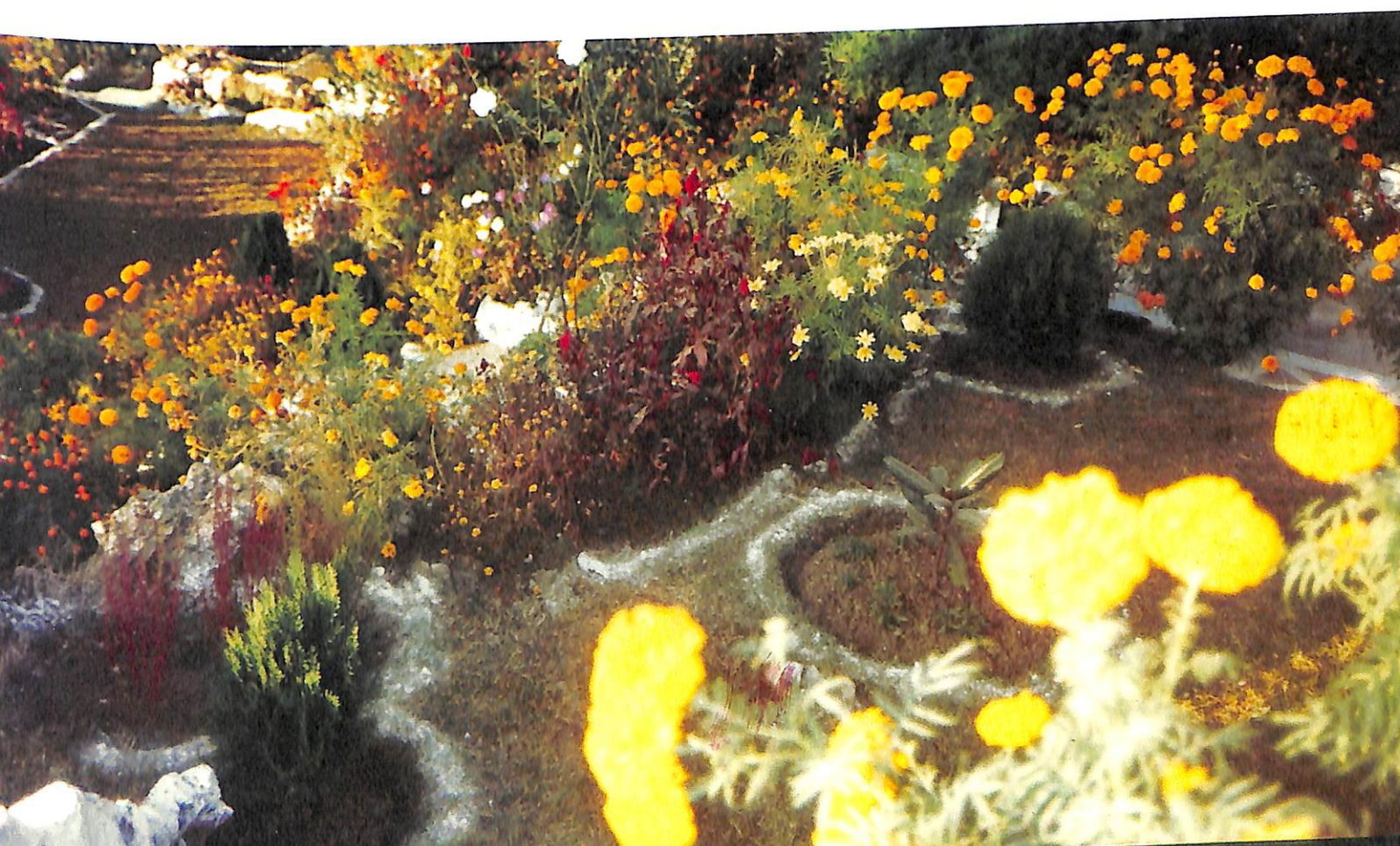
(vi) to meet the requirements of the local population with respect to grass, fodder, fuel wood and small timber;

(vii) to initiate proper fire control measures like clearance of the forest floor of any inflammable material after leaf fall, construction and regular maintenance of forest fire lines and inspection paths and construction and maintenance of cross fire lines to eliminate forest fires; and

(viii) to afforest the entire area of the watershed. Broadly, it was decided that only chir-pine would be raised in the chir-pine area, either by planting or by patch sowing, Deodar-pine would be planted in the upper reaches especially in the colder areas around Bhawan and broad leaved species would be planted in the scrub area. Besides, grasses, legumes and shrubs would be raised along the contours.

A Large number of species of plants were planted on the Trikuta hills. These included among others, (all local names) Kiker, Neem, Khair, Saroo, Kail, Deodar, Baans etc. In addition, same exotic varieties were also planted. Overall, the project envisaged the growing of 31 lakh plants, taking large scale measures for preventing soil erosion and improving the moisture retention capacity of the soil in a period of five years commencing from 1994-95.

Work commenced on the project in the year 1994-95. It was completed successfully by 2000AD.



A panoramic view from Sanji Chhat

DEVELOPMENT OF SANJI CHHAT

Sanji Chhat is a delightful little plateau two and a half kilometres short of the Holy Shrine of Vaishno Devi Ji. It is located at an altitude of 5870 feet above mean sea level and is the highest point on the yatra if a pilgrim does not use the track leading to the Shrine via Bhairo Ghati. Today it offers a panoramic view of river Chenab flowing majestically into Pakistan and a large number of nallahs making their tortuous way to join river Tawi flowing through Jammu. However, it was not always so.

Sanji Chhat was a mean looking place when the management of the Shrine was taken over in 1986. Ugly structures housing some shops and a *Chhabil* completely surrounded the main pleateau and cut off the view. The shops sold food, snacks, tea etc. The shopkeepers used to throw all their waste and left overs on the hill side. This waste had been accumulating and rotting for a long time. As a result a peculiarly offensive odour was always present in the atmosphere. Sanji Chhat also suffered from an acute shortage of water. (This is what must have prompted the setting up of a Chhabil here!)

The army had constructed a helipad at Sanji Chhat but the track leading up to it was unpaved. The Dharmarth Trust had constructed a small Dharmshala at Sanji Chhat. Another small Dharmshala had been constructed about 200 yards short of Sanji Chhat by some philanthropists. The two Dharmshalas, however, provided extremely inadequate accommodation. Toilet facilities were almost non-existent at Sanji Chhat. There was no pony shed. As a result, ponies would ease themselves on the track while the pilgrims rested or ate something just a few feet away. The only thing a pilgrim remembered about Sanji Chhat was that it was a small halting point enroute Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Ji, as dirty as the other places enroute, where the climb stopped and the track to the Shrine levelled out and became plain.

After the takeover, a closer inspection of Sanji Chhat revealed that it had enormous potential if it was properly developed. The first thing that struck the mind was that all the existing structures did not belong there and should be relocated so that the panoramic view offered by the place could be seen and enjoyed by everyone. However, before this could be done a number of things had to be planned and executed. To began with, a three fold action plan was taken up for the beautification of Sanji Chhat. The first part of the plan involved the removal of the refuse which had collected on the hill side. A large number of safai karamcharis were pressed into service for removing it from the area and putting it in pits which were dug some distance away. The

shopkeepers were strictly told not to throw any waste material on the hill. The refuse that was generated in their shops everyday was now collected in gunny bags and other containers and carried away by the safai karamcharis for being disposed of at new points that had been identified for the purpose. However, inspite of the hard work put in, the foul smell stubbornly remained with us for more than a year as it was impossible to remove the refuse that had got loged in deep crevices or in precipices. This was taken care of by Mother Nature which converted it into some kind of manure over a period of time.

The second task that was taken up was the construction of toilets.

The third task that was taken up was supplementing the water supplied to Sanji Chhat. The water supply department had constructed a 10,000 gallon reservoir at Sanji Chhat some time ago. This was connected with the system at Adhkawari from where water would be pumped up occasionally. The department was asked to construct another reservoir with a capacity of 20,000 gallons. Simultaneously, they strengthened the system at Adhkawari by increasing the storage capacity there and installing more powerful pumps at Adhkawari and Hathi Matha so that more water could be pumped to Sanji Chhat. The toilet blocks and assured water supply were in position within less than one year.

It was then decided that a new shopping complex should be constructed below the track level where the existing shops should be relocated. This envisaged the construction of a four storey structure. The lowest storey would have toilet and bathing facilities. The second storey would have accommodation for the staff and the third and the fourth storey would house the shops. Work was taken up on this complex by the beginning of 1988 and by 1989 it was ready for use. Thereafter, the shops were relocated in the new complex and the old structures on the plateau were demolished. The removal of these structures opened up Sanji Chhat.

One of the structures to be demolished at Sanji Chhat was the one housing the Chhabil. Shortly after its demolition, a delegation of devotees from Delhi came to meet the officers of the Shrine Board. On enquiry they intimated that they were members of Bhagat Milap Sewa Mandali and that their group had been coming to Vaishno Devi Ji to worship the Goddess for more than fifty years. They also stated that they had set up the Chhabil and constructed a couple of rooms at Sanji Chhat for providing shelter to the pilgrims more than twenty years ago. The demolition of their Chhabil and rooms had hurt them. It was patiently explained to them that the demolition had been necessitated due to the ongoing project for the beautification of Sanji Chhat. They were further informed that

construction of additional accommodation for pilgrims at Sanji Chhat was also envisaged in the beautification plans prepared by the Shrine Board. These people then insisted that their Mandali should be permitted to finance the construction of one such building. They also wanted to install a water cooler for the use of the pilgrims at Sanji Chhat as a replacement for the Chhabil. Seeing their sincerity and their insistence on joining hands with the Shrine Board for the development of the Shrine area their request was agreed to. They were overjoyed.

A place adjacent to the Sanji Chhat plateau on the valley side was identified for locating the building. Once the site had been identified, detailed plans were drawn up and estimates were prepared for the constructtion of a Dharamshala which could accommodate one hundred pilgrims. It was completed within one and a half years. A very elegant building was now available for the use of pilgrims at Sanji Chhat.

Earlier, work had been taken up on the renovation of the Dharamshala built by the Dharamartha Trust at Sanji Chhat. The building was a small two storeyed affair. A new toilet block was constructed with modern amenities. The flooring of all the rooms was changed and so was the electric wiring. A new coat of paint was given to the building which now started looking quite presentable.

Work was then taken up on the construction

Shopping complex, Sanji Chhat

of another toilet block along the track at Sanji Chhat, because many pilgrims were reluctant to use the toilet block constructed adjacent to the Dharamshala in view of the extra climb involved. Like the other structures at this station, the toilet block was also constructed below the track level.

After this, work was taken up for constructing a pony stand at Sanji Chhat because these animals would occupy almost two thirds of the width of the track by the way they stood diagonally on the track while waiting for their passengers. A reasonably large pony shed was constructed at Sanji Chhat to accommodate the animals. It was also constructed below the track level and its roof which was parallel to the track was used later for creating some sitting places for pilgrims.

A fairly large open area had become available after the relocation of the existing structures at Sanji Chhat. It was, therefore, decided to create a large platform with a water body to enhance its charm and to entice weary pilgrims to rest here for a while.

Plans were drawn for the purpose. These envisaged the construction of a fountain shaped like a TRISHUL on one end of the platform and a waterfall with water cascading down the hill on the other end of the platform which abutted the hill. The existing forest around Sanji Chhat would not be disturbed. If possible, additional plantation would be done to make the vegetation even more dense. The platform was proposed to be surfaced with Kota stone and the boundaries of the platform were proposed to be demarcated with well designed iron grills, both to make them look pretty and also to prevent any one from falling off the steep sides. The fountain was proposed to be illuminated so that the water would be seen in different colours, for maximum effect, at night. Besides, since it was possible to see Sanji Chhat from Jammu on a clear night, it was proposed to erect a tower and mount it with very bright lights so that people living in the area facing Sanji Chhat could see it from as far away as Jammu and know that the light they saw at night was burning on the Holy Trikuta Mountain and was lighting up the way for the vast multitude of pilgrims who thronged the Shrine every day.

Once the plans had been finalised, work was taken up. Water was very scarce at Sanji Chhat and we could not afford the luxury of wasting it by letting it flow down the hill. So, a sump tank was created below the fountain and motors were installed in the tank. These lifted the water into the fountain from where it jetted out in three streams. The motors also lifted the water into another tank which was strategically placed on the opposite hill from where it was allowed to fall and create a cascade. In view of the fact that we did not have enough water to run

Governor, Mr. Girish Chandra Saxena, inaugurating the fountain at Sanji Chhat. To his left is Dr. Farooq Abdullah, the Chief Minister of J&K. The author is standing behind Mr. Saxena

the fountain and cascade throughout the day, it was decided that the fountain and the cascade would be operational for two hours in the evening and two hours in the morning everyday.

While work on constructing the fountain and the cascade was going on the gardeners were busy in planting trees and laying beds in which the flowering plants would be planted . Soon, the filthy and stinking hill of yesteryears had been covered with flower beds in which seeds had been sown.

The electricity department installed the electric poles wherever they were required and then fixed sodium and mercury lights on them . They also erected a tower on the hill and mounted very powerful lights on it which further illuminated the area. They also installed lights in the fountain.

Thereafter, the civil engineers fixed the Kota stones and the railings on the platform.

Our plateau was ready. And it presented a very pretty picture indeed! The beauty of the platform was enhanced by its surroundings . On one side towered one of the three peaks of the Trikuta Mountain. Adjacent to it , but far away on the horizon could be seen the snow clad peaks of the Pir Panjal range. On the third side could be seen the magnificent Chenab snaking its way into Pakistan . On the fourth side could be seen the myriad nallahs flowing into river Tawi. At its feet lay the picturesque town of Katra and beyond Katra the low hills of the Shiwaliks could be seen merging into the plains of Jammu and Akhnoor.

A view of Sanji Chhat

II

The helipad constructed by the Army at Sanji Chhat was mostly used by senior officers of the Army and Air Force who would come to Sanji Chhat on helicopters. However, after the take over by the Shrine Board many other VIPs also started coming to Sanji Chhat on helicopters. This was followed by the introduction of a helicopter service for pilgrims from Jammu/Katra to Sanji Chhat and back. The service was operated by Pawan Hans (Helicopter Corporation of India) who were using a large Westland helicopter on this route and they felt that the existing helipad at Sanji Chhat was quite cramped. In view of all this the then Chief Minister, Dr. Farooq Abdullah, during one of his visits to Vaishno Devi Ji gave the orders for constructing a larger helipad at an alternate site somewhere near Sanji Chhat.

A site was selected about three fourths of a kilometre from Sanji Chhat towards Vaishno Devi Ji for constructing the helipad. We knew that the construction would be somewhat difficult because an enormous quantity of rock had to be cut and removed in order to ensure that the space created

Helipad, Sanji Chhat

Sunset, Sanji Chhat

was large enough to accommodate at least two if not three MI 8 or MI 17 helicopters at a time. At the same time it had to be ensured that the yatra was not disrupted by falling rocks and boulders because the site selected for the proposed helipad lay directly over a portion of the track. After careful consideration and discussions with the engineers it was decided that the task of cutting the rocks and allied works would be performed between 1.30 PM and 4.30 PM everyday and the yatra during this period would be diverted to the Bhairo Ghati route. The reason for selecting this time was that the yatra was leanest during this time of the day and if a pilgrim was very keen to continue his journey even during this period then he could be requested to use the track passing through Bhairo Ghati. In addition, a shelter was constructed over a portion of the track which was considered very vulnerable to falling rocks so that an unwary pilgrim travelling over this stretch was not hit by a falling stone. Once these precautions had been agreed upon and implemented the work on construction of the helipad commenced.

The pace of work was necessarily slow due to the severe restrictions imposed. However, slowly but surely the ridge began to be whittled down and a flat area began to emerge. In view of the fact that there was insufficient space on the ridge for stacking the entire quantity of broken rocks, those rocks and boulders which were not needed for constructing the helipad were rolled down the ridge into the precipice below. The others were stacked on one side of the flattened ridge so that they could be used for constructing retaining walls, wherever required, in order to make the area available for landing wider.

The approach to this helipad was made from the side nearer to Vaishno Devi Ji so that the distance to the Shrine from the helipad was further reduced.

A small lounge and a few rooms with toilets were also constructed on one side of the ridge containing the helipad.

Drinking water was brought to the helipad from Bhairo Ghati through pipes. After about one year we were able to carve out a helipad on this ridge which was almost twice the size of the helipad constructed by the army. The new helipad was large enough to accommodate at least two MI 8/MI 17 helicopters of the Indian Air Force at a time.

III

Safai karmacharis constituted the largest section of our employees who were posted at Sanji Chhat. The number of other employees posted at Sanji Chhat was somewhat limited due to the fact that Sanji Chhat was a smaller station than both Adhkawari and Vaishno Devi Ji. However, the safai karmacharis who were posted in the Sanji Chhat beat, the Bhairo Ghati beat and a part of the safai karmacharis posted at Bhawan were all lodged at Sanji Chhat. They numbered about one hundred persons.

A site was selected near Sanji Chhat for constructing a large colony for the safai karmacharis. Apart from good rooms, the colony was proposed to be equipped with modern toilets and bathrooms so that they could also live respectably.

Construction was done in phases. As each phase was completed, a batch of safai karmacharis would move into the newly constructed accommodation. Within a few years all the safai karmacharis had moved into the new colony along with their families in many cases.

Soon a new problem cropped up. Many safai karmacharis had children. Some of them were of the school going age. However, since there was no school nearby they would spend the day in loitering about. A few young children were, on occasion, noticed begging for alms from the pilgrims. We thought that the situation was alarming and needed a quick solution. It was, therefore, decided that to begin with, a primary school should be opened at Sanji Chhat, where the children could be enrolled. Discussions were held with the senior officers of the Government in the Education Department who agreed to open a school there on the condition that the Shrine Board should provide a building for housing the same. We readily agreed. So, a primary school was sanctioned for Sanji Chhat. All young boys and girls of school going age who were living in Sanji Chhat were enrolled in the school and the nuisance of loitering etc. was taken care of. The parents of these young children were extremely happy to find their children getting education in a proper school. Some of them also confessed in private that now they could hope that their children would have a brighter future because they were confident that the school would, in time, get upgraded to a High School and their children would grow up as educated young men and women.

IV

Shortly after the takeover of the management by the Shrine Board Mr. Sagar Suri a devotee of Mata expressed a desire to construct a proper hospital for pilgrims at Sanji Chhat. Somewhere around 1987 he made a token donation to the Shrine Board to demonstrate his commitment to his project. However, nothing happened on this project for the next five years and we had begun to believe that the project had been shelved. Then at the beginning of 1993 he began to speak once again of his desire to construct a hospital at Sanji Chhat and produced some plans for the proposed building. The foundation stone of the hospital was laid by the then Governor, Mr. G.C. Saxena during the middle of 1993. The hospital has now been commissioned. It is a five storied affair.

V

By now most of the things were in position at Sanji Chhat. However, the dearth of living space was still felt whenever the weather became inclement, because at such times all the pilgrims who were either near Sanji Chhat or were already at Sanji Chhat wanted to halt there till the weather improved. Thus the station used to get over crowded. It also caused a lot of inconvenience to the pilgrims. Two more buildings containing rooms and dormitories were, therefore, constructed on the uphill side opposite the shopping complex for providing additional living space for pilgrims at Sanji Chhat.

DEVELOPMENT OF BHAWAN

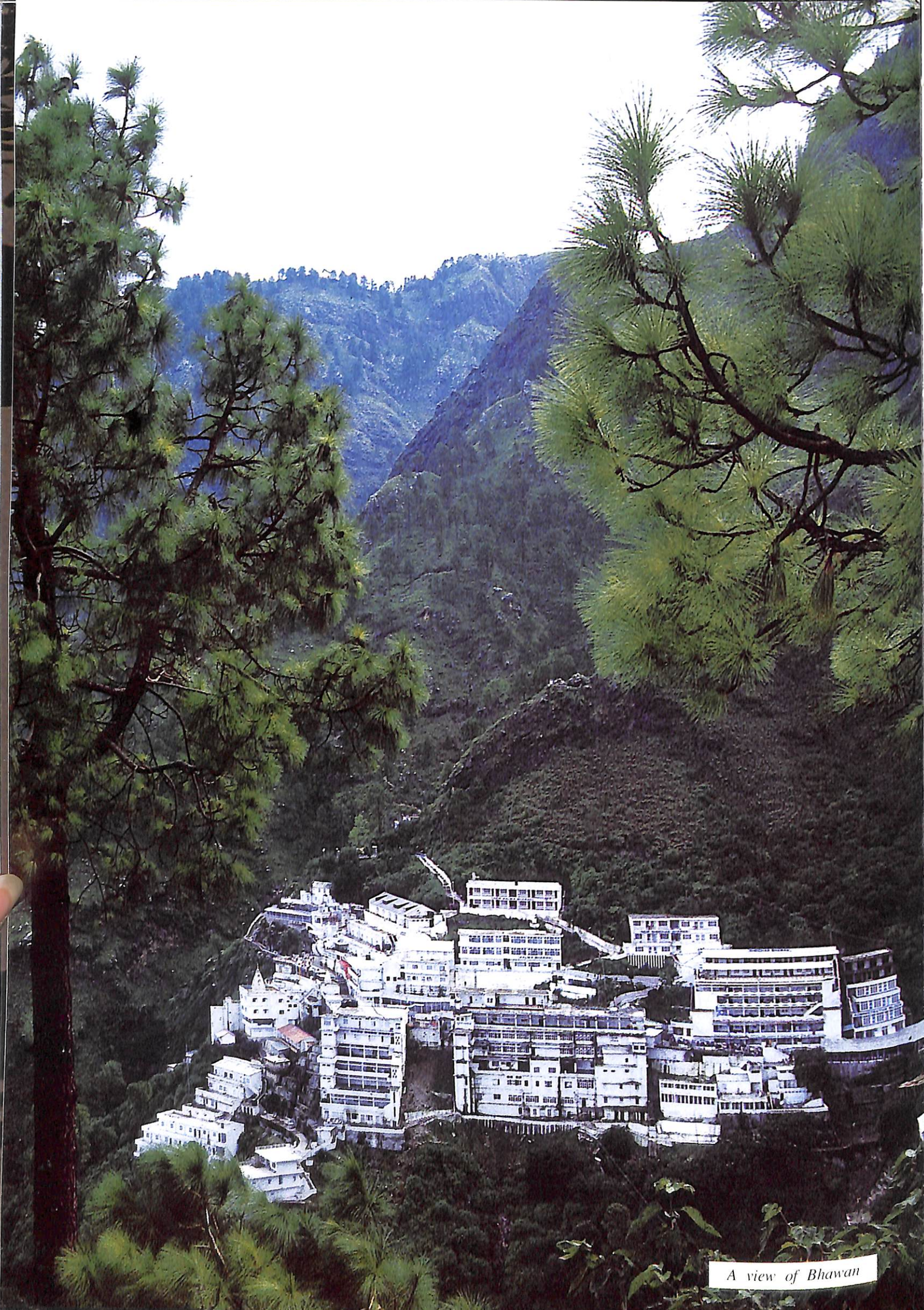
I

I have already described elsewhere the nightmarish situation that existed at Bhawan prior to the take over of the management. The situation needed drastic action. The initial emphasis was laid on cleaning up the area. A massive operation was mounted to remove the garbage and filth lying all over the place. Slowly but surely the filth and garbage in the area began to disappear. Thereafter, the beggars, who were polluting the area were shifted to Katra where a camp had been set up for looking after their needs. Next came the ponies and mules. An area away from the Shrine was earmarked as the last point up to which the pilgrim could travel on a pony. Beyond that every one had to walk. The removal of the ponies resulted in the area around the Bhawan getting a cleaner look. The track between the entry point to Bhawan and the Bathing Ghat was thereafter quickly paved so that it would became amenable to regular cleaning and could provide a more comfortable surface for the pilgrims to walk on. Thereafter, work was taken up on extensively repairing and renovating the existing Dharmshalas. The flooring of the entire Shakti Bhawan was changed and its doors and windows were repaired. The seepage of water was stopped by proper treatment at appropriate places. The electrification of the entire building was also done. While all this was going on, new toilets were constructed on every floor of this building for the use of the pilgrims and it was painted from inside and outside. Coir matting was purchased in huge quantity and laid on all the floors of the building and new blankets were purchased for the use of pilgrims. By the time we had completed our work in this building it had become a habitable Dharmshala. The building was renamed as Durga Bhawan.

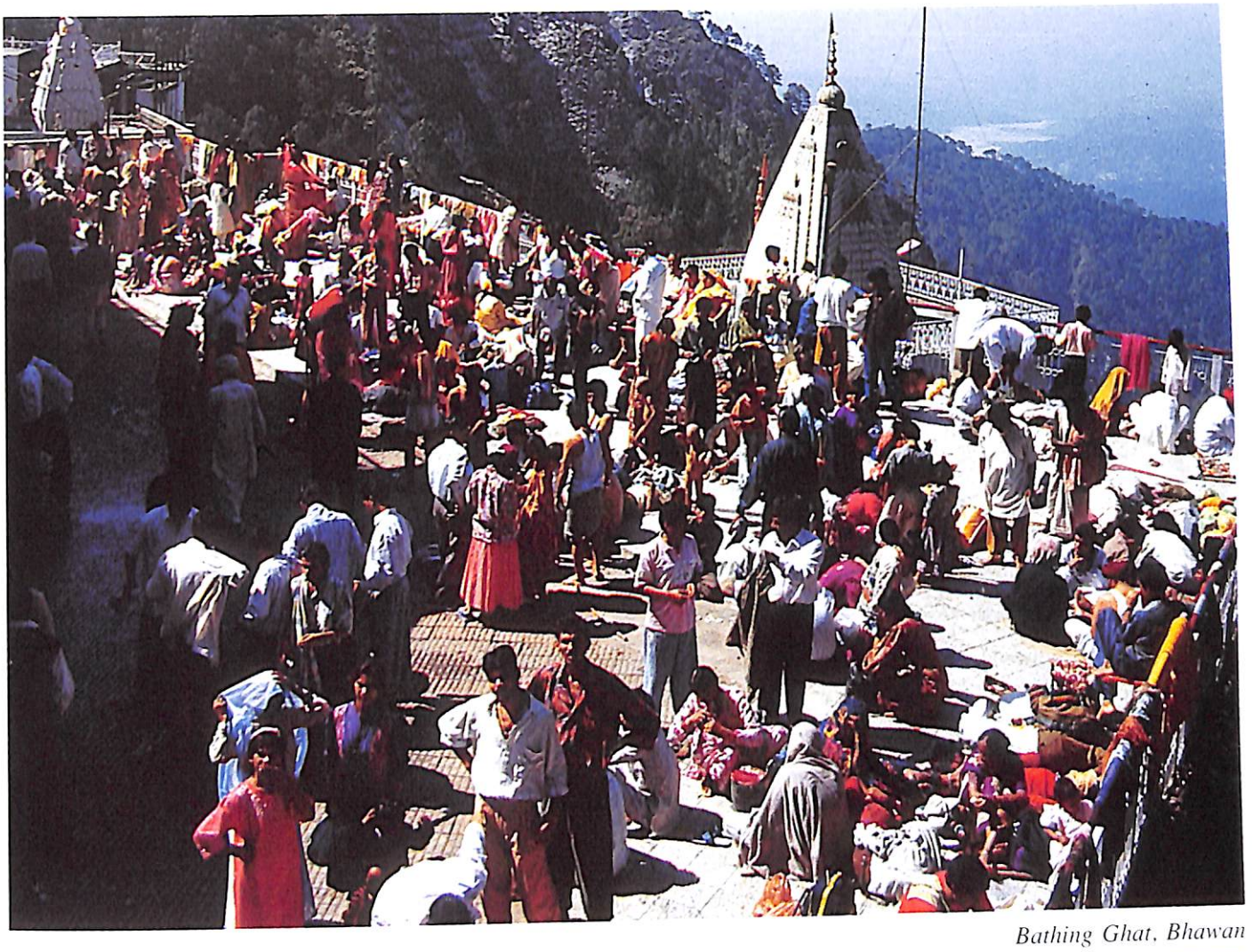
Toilet blocks were similarly constructed on all floors in the other two Dharmshalas also. New electric wiring was fixed in these two buildings too and finally all these buildings were painted from inside and outside. As a result the Bhawan area began to look clean and presentable.

New and modern toilet blocks were also constructed at a number of places at Bhawan for the use of the pilgrims. The existing bathing ghat was extended by the removal of the Bhaint shop and another bathing ghat was constructed.

The shops which existed at Bhawan now seemed to be quite out of place at their present location. A new shopping complex was, therefore, constructed away from the Bhawan and all the shops were relocated there. Once the shops had been shifted out of the Bhawan area it began to look more open and spacious.

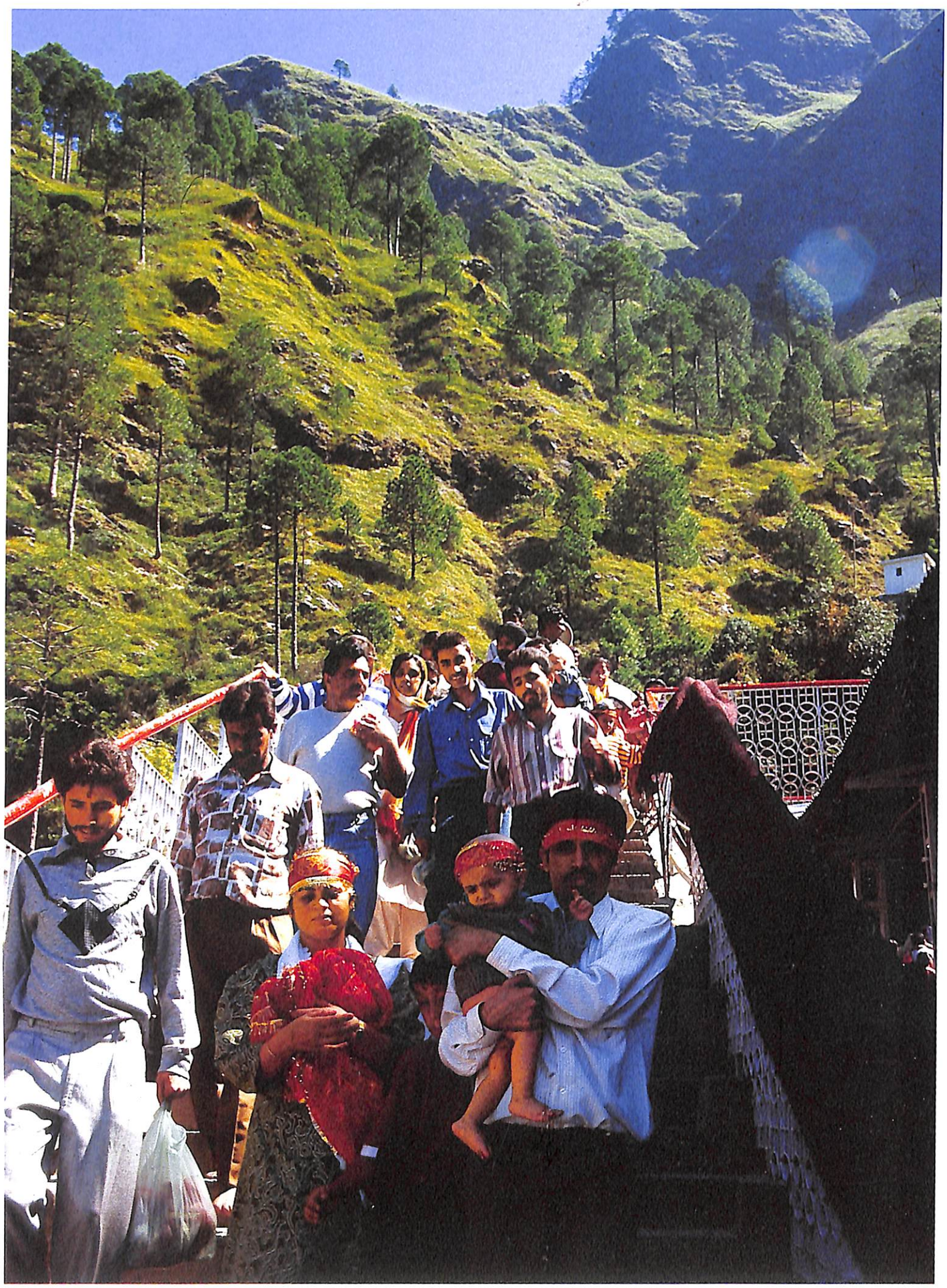


A view of Bhawan



Bathing Ghat, Bhawan

Governor, General Rao, inspecting the works. The author is to the right of Gen. Rao



Pilgrims returning after Darshan

The track leading from the new shopping area to the Bhawan was widened by chiselling the rocks and by raising huge concrete walls and pillars till we had a continuous stretch of track approximately 24 feet wide as against the earlier width of 7-8 feet. Similarly, the area leading to the holy shrine was also appropriately widened.

While all these works were going on we also took up work on construction of additional accommodation at Bhawan for the use of yatris. New Kalika Bhawan,New Shridhar Bhawan, Lakshmi Bhawan, Gouri Bhawan and 2nd block of Vaishnavi Bhawan came up. In addition, a large number of cottages, known as huts, were also constructed. Work was also started on a large new building for pilgrims known as Manokamana Bhawan.

Closed Circuit TV system (CCTV) and centralised audio system were then installed all over the Bhawan area for keeping the pilgrims engaged with films with religious themes and "Bhajans" during the period they were waiting for their turn for Dharshan.

The entire stretch from the new shopping complex to the Lakshmi Bhawan was covered with a long shed. This gave respite to the pilgrims from rain, snow and sun.

Baggage X-ray plants were installed for scanning the baggage of the pilgrims as a precaution from the security point of view.

Blankets were purchased in thousands for being distributed amongst pilgrims. An automatic blanket laudering plant was also installed for regularly cleaning the blankets so that the pilgrim was given only clean blankets.

A Bhojanalya was opened at Bhawan for giving clean, wholesome food to the pilgrims at subsidized rates. Every thing was served to the pilgrims in disposable containers.

The area of the Shiv Gufa at Bhawan was properly developed. A large platform was created outside this cave for the use of the pilgrims. In addition, a large toilet block was also constructed nearby.

A large number of buildings were constructed for housing the Police Station, the security forces deployed at Bhawan and for providing accommodation to the staff posted there.

Cameras were installed inside the holy cave to send images of the holy Pindies to the TV sets installed at various places in the Bhawan.

A very high standard of cleanliness was insisted upon. About two hundred safai karamcharis were deployed to keep the Bhawan and its surrounding areas clean. They were equipped with modern brooms, sludge pumps, fogging machines, spray pumps, vacuum cleaners etc.

II
THE NEW TUNNEL

When the management and administration of the holy Shrine was taken over by the new Board in 1986, the entrance to the holy Shrine was through two tunnels. One of them was used for going in to the sanctum sanctorum and the other one was used for coming out of it. To begin with there had been only one tunnel, which had been created by nature, which led into the Shrine. This was used for both entering the Holy Shrine and for coming out of it. However, as the number of pilgrims going for Darshan increased, the single opening to the holy cave began to appear to be insufficient to cater to the rush. It was assessed that not more than 2000 pilgrims could go in for Darshan in 24 hours through the single opening leading to the Holy Shrine. The management of the Holy Shrine during that period was under the control of the Dharmarth Trust and the Baridaars. The increasing rush of pilgrims, especially during the summer months and the autumn and spring Navratras, forced them to take a decision to carve out a second opening into the cave. The second tunnel was operationalised in 1977 and the expenditure on its construction was borne by the Baridaars. It became possible to provide Darshan to approximately 6000 to 7000 pilgrims in a day as a consequence of the construction of the second tunnel, because the traditional tunnel was thereafter used only as the inlet tunnel and the new tunnel that had been constructed began to be used as the exit tunnel, thus forming a one way circuit. The construction of the second tunnel sufiсed to meet the requirement of the pilgrims till around 1982. Thereafter, the number of pilgrims visiting the Holy Shrine for Darshan every year crossed the 10 lakhs mark and long periods of waiting for Darshan began to be witnessed at times. This was due to the wide variation in pilgrim arrivals between the periods of peak rush and low yatra. During peak rush, there were occasions when the daily arrival of pilgrims at Katra would touch the 10,000 mark whereas during the lean periods the number of pilgrims arriving at Katra sometimes fell to less then 1000 per day. However, since the periods of peak rush days were confined to a few days in a year the difficulty was not of a very serious nature and could be lived with.

The number of pilgrims visiting the holy Shrine for Darshan, however, began to climb up steadily after 1986. In 1987 more than eighteen lakh pilgrims visited the holy Shrine. By 1989 their number had gone up to almost twenty three lakhs. The rising number of pilgrims indicated three trends. The first was that there was a general increase in the yatra all through the year which meant that the arrival figures of pilgrims who came for the yatra everyday when compared to similar figures of earlier years showed.

दान पात्र
DONATION BOX

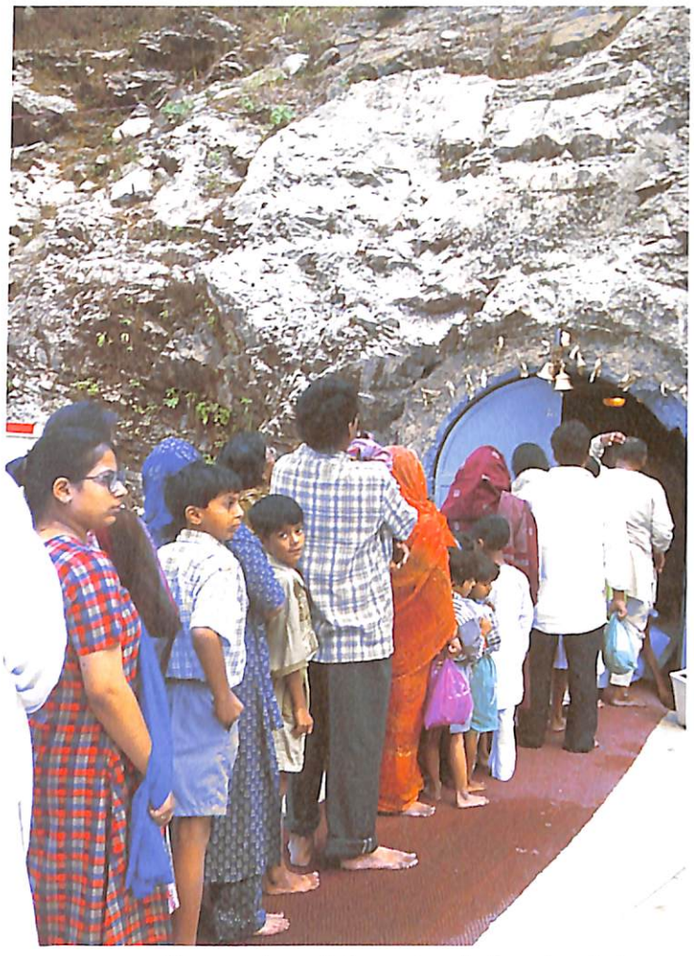
a rising graph. The second trend was that on peak rush days the daily arrival figures of pilgrims at Katra began to touch the 14000 to 16000 mark. The third trend witnessed was that the number of peak rush days began to increase rapidly. Due to this reason, the number of days in a year when the pilgrims had to be made to wait at Katra for their turn to go up for Darshan to the holy Shrine also began to increase. As a result, large number of complaints began to be heard from the pilgrims regarding unsatisfactory arrangements made by the new Board. Meanwhile, we had been experimenting with various permutations and combinations in order to increase the clearance capacity of the cave. The first thing we tried was to stop the pilgrims from climbing up on to the platform where the holy Pindies were located for having Darshan. The second thing we did was to remove the steps near the holy Pindies so that the pilgrims could get as close to the platform where the holy Pindies were situated as possible. The third thing that we did was to lay flat cemented tiles on the floor of the inlet tunnel so that the pilgrims could walk on an even surface while going in through the traditional cave. All these measures helped to increase the clearance capacity of the cave from 7000 pilgrims per day to 9000 pilgrims per day approximately. However, this was not quite sufficient, because as already indicated the clearance of the pilgrims was not keeping pace with the continuously increasing arrival figures. Consequently, the Board took a decision in 1989 to construct another tunnel leading to the Shrine. The Board also resolved that

The tunnel from inside

The route leading to the new tunnel

efforts should be made to ensure that the new tunnel should be high enough to permit a reasonably tall man to walk upright in the cave in order to speed up the movement of the pilgrims through the cave. The Geological Survey of India were contacted and requested to advise the Board whether another tunnel leading to the sanctum sanctorum could be constructed. They sent their experts to study the geological strata and subsequently advised that it was possible to construct another tunnel leading to the Shrine. Thereafter this work was entrusted to the National Projects Construction Corporation. It took two years to construct the tunnel, because all the work had to be done manually with hammers, chisels, pick-axes, iron rods etc. When the tunnel was ready a few trials were conducted to see whether it would function more effectively as an inlet tunnel or as an exit tunnel. The trials revealed that if the pilgrim was made to go in through the new artificial tunnel he/she was able to get the first glimpse of the holy Pindies from almost as far away as 10 feet and if he kept his eyes open then he would be in a position to see the holy Pindies continuously for almost 25-30 seconds. This was about four times longer than the time that a pilgrim got to see the Holy Pindies under the existing arrangements. The second thing the trial revealed was that if the new tunnel was used as an inlet tunnel and the tunnel that had been constructed by the Baridaars was used as an exit tunnel it would enable about 20,000 pilgrims to get Darshan within 24 hours. This was almost 100 per cent more than the existing arrangements permitted. Meanwhile, the yatra had been increasing with leaps and bounds. By 1991 the yatra figure had crossed 31 lakhs per year

mark. This was a huge number and imparted urgency to commissioning the new tunnel. The matter was, therefore, placed before the Board which resolved that it would be appropriate to take a decision on the subject only after seeing the situation on the ground at the holy Shrine. After making an on the spot assessment, the Board resolved that the new tunnel that had been constructed should be used as the inlet tunnel and the second tunnel that had been constructed by the Baridaars during 1977 should be used as the exit tunnel. The Board also directed that only about 18000 pilgrims should be allowed to come up to Bhawan in 24 hours so that they could have reasonable and comfortable Darshan. Allied with this decision, the Board also directed that separate routes should be constructed and earmarked for taking the pilgrims in to the holy cave and for carrying them outside the holy cave so that the criss-crossing of pilgrims was reduced to the minimum. The Board also resolved that the pilgrims would be allowed to use the traditional tunnel for entering the holy Shrine whenever the yatra was less than 10,000 per day. In 1991 this meant that this facility would be available to the pilgrims for the entire duration of the winter months. The Board also resolved that except for the two months of May and June and the period of the Navratras, the pilgrims desirous of going for Darshan through the traditional tunnel would have the option of doing so between 4 AM and 6 AM everyday irrespective of the rush of pilgrims at the Shrine. Such pilgirms would, however, have to get themselves registered with the SDM/Tehsildar Bhawan for this purpose so that suitable directions could be issued to the duty staff in their favour.



Restoration of the natural facade of the hill

The construction of the new tunnel helped to overcome the problem of long periods of waiting for the pilgrims at Katra because it was only on rare days that more than 18,000 pilgrims reached Katra. Thus the difficulty of stopping the yatra at Katra during the periods of heavy rush was resolved. However, the complaint of the pilgrims regarding unsatisfactory Darshan persisted. Most of them claimed that they had not been able to see the holy Pindies. Some of them, of course, had not been able to do so because they had kept their eyes closed all through the period they were in the holy Cave as the Hindus normally do when they enter a temple. So, obviously they could have seen nothing. However, a large number of them who had kept their

The platform outside the new tunnel

eyes open also said that they had not been able to see the holy Pindies. A careful examination of the sanctum sanctorum was made. It revealed that a large number of idols made of gold, silver and other metals and adorned with fine jewellery had been placed behind the holy Pindies at an elevation that was higher than that of the holy Pindies. In a normal man - made temple, the idol is usually situated at a height somewhat coterminous with the eye level of the devotee. Besides, it is usually quite large. Therefore, it can be seen clearly by the devotees even from a distance. So, whenever a Hindu goes to a temple, he usually expects his eyes to encounter a largish idol at or above the eye level. However, things at the holy Shrine of Vaishno Devi Ji are substantially different. The holy Shrine is located in a cave deep in the bowels of a mountain. The holy Pindies representing Mata Mahakali Ji, Mata Mahalakshmi Ji or Vaishno Mata Ji and Mata Maha Sarswati Ji are believed to be self revealed (SWAYAM-BHU) and not established and consecrated (STHAPITA EVAM PRATISHTHIT) by man. Therefore, they are and have to remain exactly as they were fashioned by the Creator. So, even though the holy Pindies are five and a half feet tall from the base, where the Charan Ganga emanates, yet their base is also three feet below the place where the pilgrim stands for Darshan and thus the pilgrim's eye level is about two and a half feet above the holy Pindies. Besides, the colour of the roof of the cave above the holy Pindies and the colour of the holy Pindies is almost the same- they are both dark and thus at first glance the Pindies seem to be a part of the total rock feature. The only thing which distinguishes them from the rest

of the rock feature is the fact that they are located on a platform which is covered with white marble and they protrude out in small features. Besides, a closer inspection reveals that they have a different colour when compared to the rest of the rock feature around. Even the protrusions are quite insubstantial in size and would not invite a second glance in a normal place. Nothing can be done to increase their size. We realised then that when the pilgrim reached the sanctum sanctorum his eyes instinctively searched for an idol at eye level. Some-times he also forgot that it was the holy Pindies which he should be looking for and not a man made idol. When he found nothing at eye level, then his eyes began to look around frantically, searching for the symbol of the Goddess. Then his eyes would be drawn to the large number of idols made of metal and stone which were lying at a lower level. These were adorned with a lot of jewellery which would be reflecting the light in the cave. In this crowd of idols the pilgrim would completely miss the holy Pindies, which in fact he had really come to see, primarily because they are small in size, they were located at a level even below the idols and were virtually smothered by flower petals as a misplaced sign of devotion. So, he would come out of the cave quite bewildered, because he could not be certain which of the many idols inside the sanctum sanctorum were the holy Pindies. He could not believe that the small, insubstantial and dark protrusions of rock, which he had almost

The holy Pindies smothered with flowers

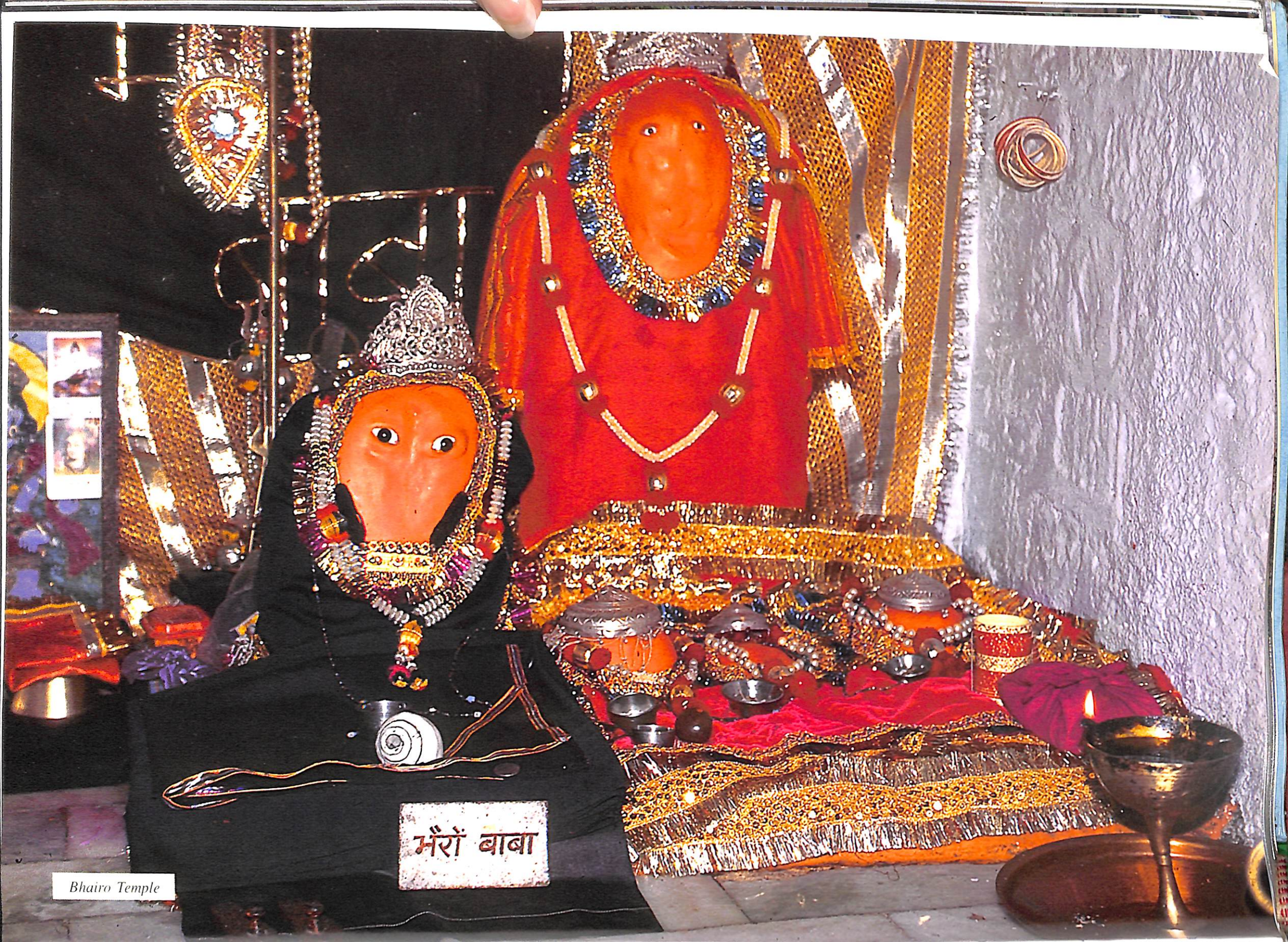
Cascade, Bhawan

Havan being performed outside the new tunnel

completely failed to notice, both due to the crowd of idols inside and the little time given to him at the sanctum sanctorum, were in fact the holiest of the holy Pindies and represented the Goddess in her three manifestations of SATVA GUNA, TAM GUNA and RAJ GUNA. After great deliberation the Board resolved to cover all other idols etc. in the sanctum sanctorum with a curtain during the period when the Darshan was on so that the only thing that remained visible at the sanctum sanctorum were the holy Pindies. It also ordered that a minimum quantity of flower petals should be placed on the holy Pindies in order to improve their visibility. After the idols had been curtained off and the quantity of flower petals placed on the holy Pindies had been reduced drastically, the holy Pindies became quite prominent because then they remained the only things that could be seen at the sanctum sanctorum. This certainly improved the satisfaction level of the Darshan. The decisions that have been described above may seem quite reasonable and sensible now but they stirred quite a hornet's nest when they were taken. As a result of the increase in the clearance capacity at the holy Shrine we did not have to stop the yatra at Katra even during rush periods. Earlier, whenever the arrival figures of pilgrims at Katra would touch the 9000 to 10000 mark in a day, the yatra had to be stopped and people had to be made to wait in Katra. So they would willy-nilly have to rent a room in a hotel in Katra for the night and eat their meals in the restaurants and Dhabhas in Katra thereby leaving a large portion of their money with the local hoteliers. However, when there was no need for stopping the yatra at Katra due to the increased clearance capacity

at the Shrine, then there was no need for the pilgrims to hire a room at Katra for the night. Now only those pilgrims would stay in Katra for the night who wished to spend a night there out of their own choice. A great furore was, therefore, created by the hoteliers and Dhabhawallas at the commissioning of the new tunnel at Bhawan and vilification campaigns were also launched by them against individual officers of the Board and also against the Board collectively. Subsequently, when the Board resolved to curtain off the idols inside the sanctum sanctorum, such elements tried to project this action as a horrific act that had been performed by the Board. Dire consequences of this 'unholy act' of the Board were predicted. Whispering campaigns were mounted saying that the Goddess was furious and She would destroy everybody in the Board for having performed such an irreligious act. However, when nothing happened, the whispering campaign gradually died down and the yatra continued uninterruptedly.

After the new tunnel was thrown open for the pilgrims a need was felt for creating a sufficiently large platform outside the new inlet and exit tunnels so that a large number of pilgrims could be provided sitting space there while they were awaiting their turn for going in to the sanctum sanctorum for Darshan. Besides, marble slabs had been fixed against the hill side in which the new tunnels had been excavated. This had taken away the natural look of the hill. It was, therefore, decided that two things should be done. First, a very large platform should be constructed outside the new tunnel so that it could accommodate about 800-1000 pilgrims at a time. Second, the marble cladding that had been fixed against the hill side should be removed so that a natural look could be imparted to the hill feature that contained the exit and inlet tunnels. It was slow and tedious work because care had to be taken to ensure that the hill feature did not get destablised. However, work was finally completed and the whole hill began to give a natural look. It was complemented by a huge platform that had been raised in front of the two tunnels. While the work on the platform was going on, it was noticed that a natural cascade existed adjacent to the holy cave which could be easily seen from the platform that had been constructed. However, the cascade was a seasonal affair and would be created during the monsoon by the rain water that fell on the mountain. Once the rains were over the cascade would dry up. However, as long as water continued to cascade down the mountain the sight and sound of the falling water created a most soothing effect. It was, thereore, decided that the water that cascaded down the hill would be dammed at two or three places below the cave so that small water bodies could be created. Water fowl and different kinds of lotus flowers would be put in the water bodies. In addition, motors would be installed in these water bodies to pump the dammed water up the hill so that it could be released at an appropriate place thereby creating a cascade. This cascade would be a perennial affair and enhance the beauty of the area around the Holy Shrine considerably. Work on this project is proposed to be taken up shortly.



Bhairo Temple

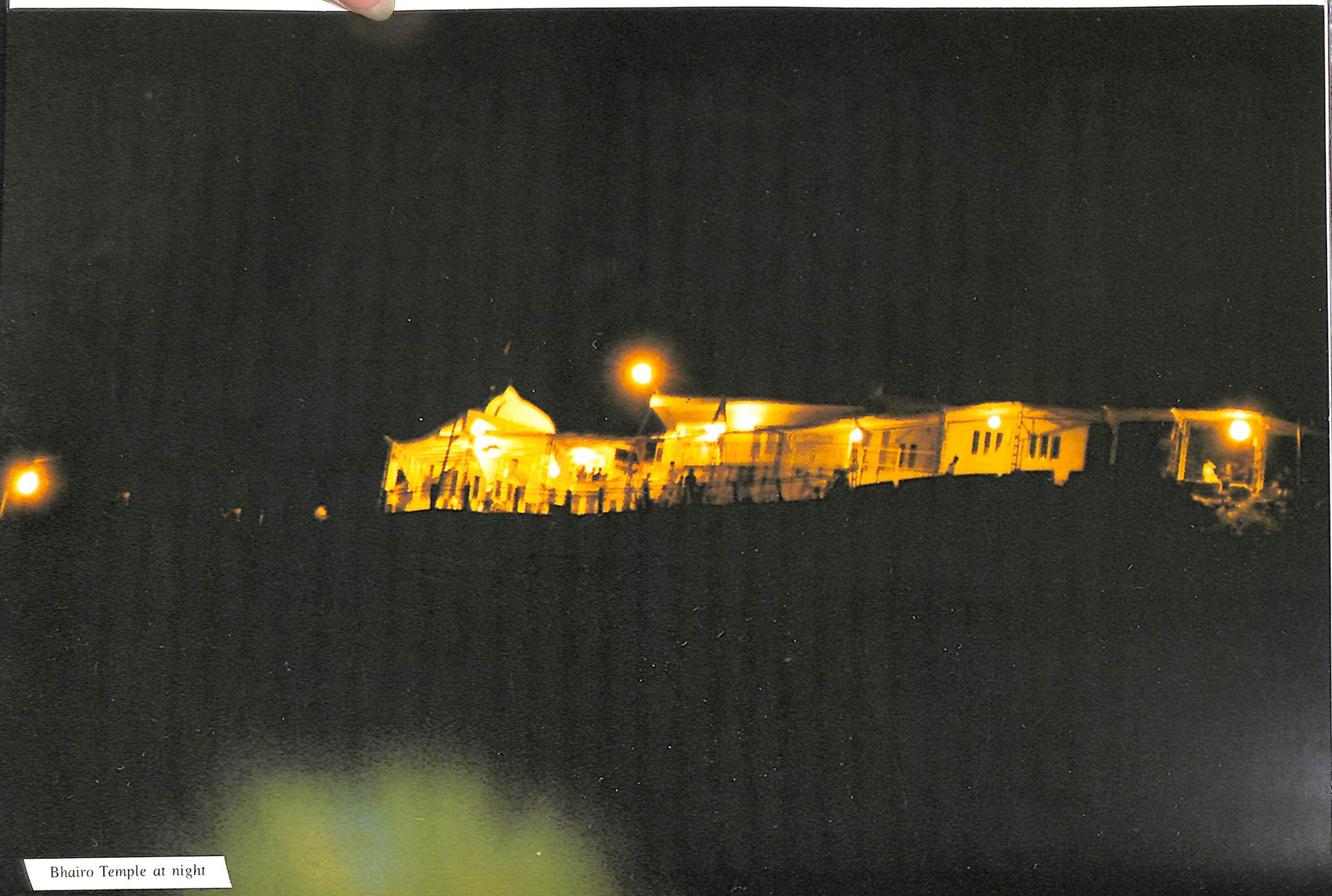
DEVELOPMENT OF BHAIRO GHATI

The track between Vaishno Devi Ji and Sanji Chhat via Bhairo Ghati had been left untouched when the main track was being laid out . So, this continued to remain uneven , slippery and hazardous . Work had not been taken up on this portion because of two reasons. First , because the track from Darshani Darwaza to Vaishno Devi Ji was more than twelve kilometers long and this task had been stupendous enough to keep the officers of the Shrine Board occupied during the first year and the second because , by the time work on the main track had been completed winter had set in. During the cold season, hardly any pilgrim ventured to Bhairo Temple as the area used to get snowed under. However, with the onset of summer , as the yatra picked up many pilgrims began to use this route on their return journey to Katra, because legend said that the yatra was incomplete if the pilgrim did not have Darshan of Bhairo. And complaints and suggestions began to pour in . Every one wanted the facilities along this stretch to be brought at par with those available on the main track . This meant that the track should be widened and laid with tiles so that walking on it would become more comfortable ; parapets should be constructed and iron grills and railings should be fixed on them to overcome the possibility of an unwary pilgrim rolling down into the ravines and gorges; the track should be lit up in order to facilitate walking at night; drinking water should be made available at regular intervals and toilets and shelter units should be constructed at appropriate places.

In deference to the wishes of the pilgrims it was decided to take up work on this stretch of the track during 1988. The most important part of the work was the laying of a proper track . The existing track was suitably widened at a number of places and a storm water drain was constructed to take care of the rain water. Tiles were laid on the track and parapets and iron railings were installed all along the route . The area in front of the Bhairo temple was also widened to ensure that when pilgrims reached here in relatively large groups they would have space to move about.

There were a few ugly structures housing a couple of shops each at Bhairo temple and at old Sanji Chhat . They were an eye sore. Work was taken up for construction of new structures where these shops would be relocated . Within a few months these were ready and the old dilapidated structures were knocked out in order to make the area look clean and beautiful.

Work was also taken up on the beautification of the temple at Bhairo Ghati . After it had been agreed that the basic structure of the temple would be left intact for the time being , embellishments were made to the temple by way of cladding the walls with



Bhairo Temple at night

Bhairo Temple during day

marble tiles and fixing marble slabs along the PARIKRAMA (perambulation) of the temple.

There was no water supply at Bhairo Ghati or anywhere on the track leading to it. Water that had been needed for completing the cement work on this portion of the track had been brought manually from either Vaishno Devi Ji or Sanji Chhat , depending on which place was closer to the place where the work was going on at a given point of time . In fact , water supply in this entire area was a problem. There were no springs near the Bhairo Ghati area which could have been tapped . So willy nilly, for the first two and a half years the Shrine Board had to continue with the earlier system of running 'Chhabils' on this portion of the track.

Meanwhile , work was taken up on illuminating this area. Sub-stations were constructed, steel tubular poles were erected at appropriate distances and conductors were strung on them. Once this work was complete sodium vapour lamp fittings were installed and the entire stretch was lit up . The entire hill feature opposite the mountain within which the Holy Shrine of Vaishno Devi Ji was located was bathed in a warm, golden glow and everyone who saw the hill lit up for the first time was entranced.

Even though a lot had been done in the Bhairo Ghati area yet every one felt that until running water was made available in abundance in the Bhairo area the work would remain incomplete. The Public Health Engineering Deptt. was asked to take up the work . By late 1989, the department had succeeded in lifting water to Bhairo Ghati from Sui Nallah, a vertical height of more than 900 metres . They also constructed a reservoir of 50,000 gallons capacity which was filled by them twice a day . Thus 1 lakh gallons of water was now available for use in Bhairo area . Within no time drinking water points were constructed at a number of places along the track and the Chhabils were wound up.

Work was also taken up on the construction of a cafetaria cum view point on a mound a little distance away from the Bhairo temple. The site selected commanded a panoramic view of the Chenab and Tawi rivers shimmering on the horizon in the sunlight and the low hills of the Shivaliks merging with the plains. At night, the lights of Jammu and Akhnoor could be seen strung like a long band of jewels on a diamond bracelet. Within a few months the cafeteria was complete and was commissioned for use. We named it Om. It is one of the most charming spots on the entire route.

Thereafter, work was taken up on the construction of rain and sun shelters at a few selected places along the track . The nature of this work was, however, a continuing one and it is still going on at predetermined sites.

OTHER ACTIVITIES OF THE BOARD

The Shrine Board has been actively involved in charitable and philanthropic activities right from its inception. All the pilgrims who undertake the pilgrimage are automatically insured for an amount of Rs. One Lakh against accidental death as soon as they proceed ahead of Darshani Darwaza. The premium for this insurance is paid by the Shrine Board. Similarly, all the ponies that ply on the track carrying the pilgrims from Katra to Bhawan and back are also insured as are the pony operators. In their case too the premium is paid by the Shrine Board. The Board sometimes also distributes sweaters and hunter shoes amongst the pony and mule operators.

The Shrine Board is running two Mahila Mandals, one each at Charan Paduka and Aghar Jitto, to provide a respectable means of livelihood to the ladies of the families of erstwhile Baridaars and some other ladies who used to beg for alms on the track earlier.

In case any pilgrim is not carrying sufficient money to deposit as security for the blankets that he may wish to borrow for himself and his family, he can approach the S.D.M at Bhawan for the waiver of this requirement. Similarly, if he runs short of

Mahila Mandal

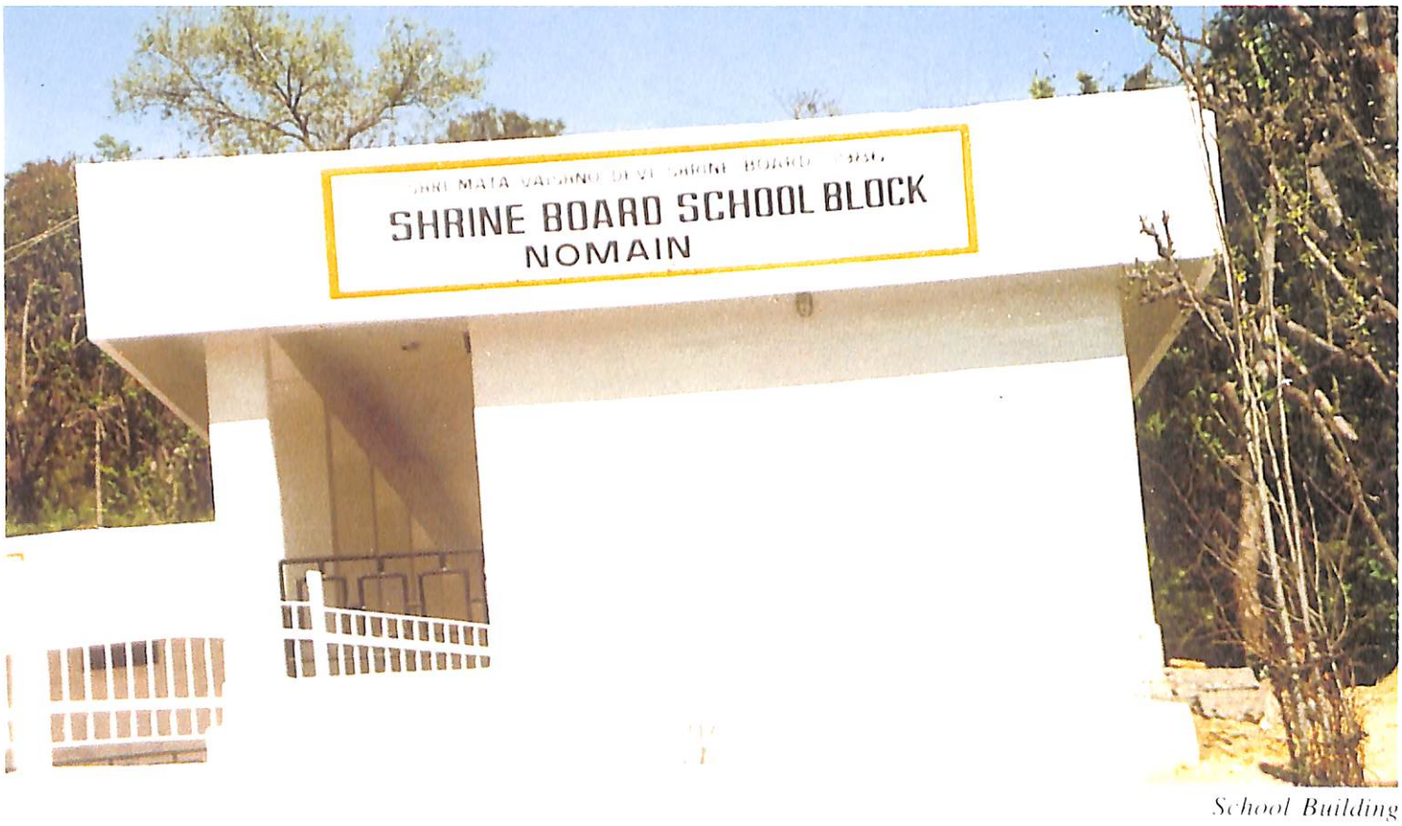
money to reach home he can approach the Central Office of the Shrine Board which immediately provides him the requisite amount. In case a pilgrim dies while performing the yatra, and the family wishes to perform the last rites at Katra, the Shrine Board pays the money required for the cremation of the body. If, however, the family wishes to take the body to their home town for cremation, then the Shrine Board pays fifty percent of the cost of transporting the body by taxi to their home town.

The Shrine Board provides free lodging to most pilgrims at Adh Kwari and Bhawan. It also provides free blankets to the pilgrims and only expects the pilgrims to deposit a refundable security for them. However, no security is charged from the Sadhus who visit the holy Shrine. Indeed, the Shrine Board also provides free food to such Sadhus.

The Shrine Board also provides grant-in-aid in the form of cash or kind to people or organizations in case of an emergency or a calamity.

The Shrine Board has been constantly encouraging education in the area of its operation. It has funded the construction of a large number of school buildings in and around Katra. In fact, it sets apart funds for this purpose every year in its budget. It also provides uniforms and furniture to schools. Now it is preparing to set up the first Technical University in J&K. That is going to be a gigantic project and is likely to have far reaching consequences for the State.

Recently, the Shrine Board has also taken a decision to set up a Dogra Heritage Centre-cum-Museum for encouraging and where necessary reviving the various facets of the culture of the Dogras. Earlier, it had provided fellowships to a large number of scholars of Jammu University to



School Building

Class room

carry out studies on Indian culture.

The Jammu-Katra-Reasi axis is replete with the history of Jammu region. The Shrine Board has tried to highlight some aspects of this. It has extensively repaired, renovated and reconstructed the memorial of Veer Ram Chandra at Bathera near Jammu. Veer Ram Chandra laid down his life while fighting for the cause of the down trodden sections of society.

Similarly, the Shrine Board has done a lot of work to develop Aghar Jitto, the birth place of the revolutionary peasant, Baba Jitto. Aghar Jitto is situated five kilometers beyond Katra on the Katra-Reasi road. Baba Jitto was born here and spent his childhood and youth in this village before he migrated to the present day village of Jhiri near Jammu. It was at Jhiri that he committed suicide to protest against the tyranny of the feudal system and the feudal lords. A fair is held every year at Jhiri to commemorate the sacrifice of Baba Jitto and his young daughter (she burnt herself to death on the funeral pyre of her father as she could not bear the shock of his death). A very large number of people come from different parts of North India to participate in the fair at Jhiri. Similarly, a fair is held every year at Aghar Jitto too. The Shrine Board has laid out a beautiful park around the temple of Baba Jitto. A huge statue of Baba Jitto and his daughter has also been constructed in the park. A Dharamshala has been constructed near the park to provide accommodation to such pilgrims who may wish to spend a night there. A huge school building has also been constructed nearby for the children of the area. In addition, the Shrine Board has constructed a very large and modern shopping complex for the convenience of the people who visit Aghar Jitto. A Mahila Mandal has also been set up here to provide

Veer Ramchandra Smarak, Bathera

respectable work for the ladies of the area. Besides, a telephone exchange has been got opened here for the convenience of every one.

Another legendary hero of the area honoured by the Shrine Board is Zorawar Singh, the warrior general, who conquered Ladakh, Gilgit, Baltistan and parts of Tibet. Zorawar Singh settled down in Reasi, a town near Katra. The Bhim Garh fort in Reasi was the place where Zorawar first won his laurels. This fort was in a terrible state of disrepair and there were apprehensions that if repairs were not carried out urgently it could fall down. The Shrine Board took up the work of repairing and renovating this fort on a large scale in honour of the memory of this great warrior. Besides repairing the fort, the Shrine Board has also laid out a huge park with extensive walk ways around the fort. Now the fort is also illuminated at night and the place has become a lovely spot which attracts many people.

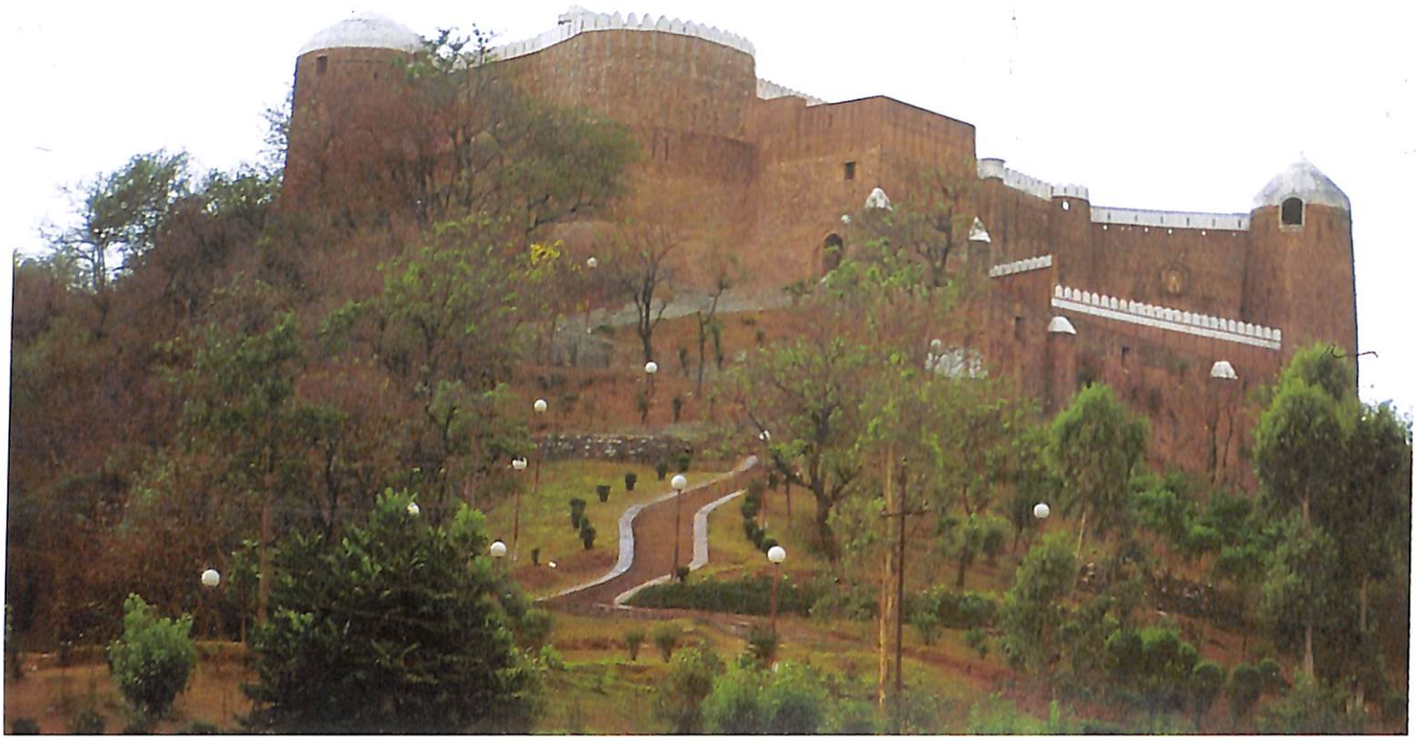
Apart from the projects taken up for honouring the heroes of Jammu, the Shrine Board also took up work on developing some of the spots associated with the holy Shrine of Mata Vaishno Devi Ji. These included the temples of Kol Kandoli and Bhumika. The temple of Kol Kandoli is situated at a place called Nagrota, which is twelve kilometers from Jammu on the Jammu Katra road. This is a set of two ancient temples and they fell on the old route leading to Katra. According to the legend, the Goddess lived here for many years as a child in the TRETA YUG before she moved to the base of the Trikuta Mountain and set up her Ashram there. The Shrine Board

Baba Jitto

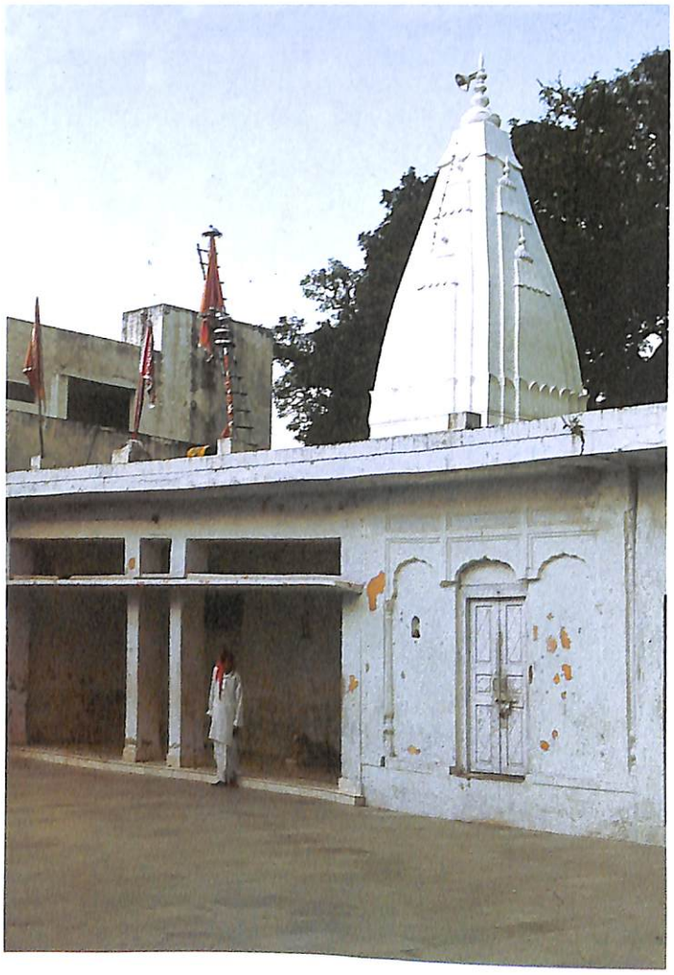
associated the Archaeological Survey of India while developing this temple complex because the outer surface of these temples had been heavily overlaid with very ugly cement plaster. This was carefully chiselled away by the experts of the ASI and the stone used to construct the temples was brought out in sharp relief. In addition, a huge courtyard outside the temple was constructed with marble and a ceremonial gate was constructed at the entrance of the temple complex. A few rooms were also constructed inside the temple premises for the use of the pilgrims. By the time we had finished the work at the temple complex of Kol Kandoli it had become almost unrecognisable. Indeed, it had begun to look as majestic and serene as it probably had looked when it was originally constructed. The Shrine Board has only renovated and developed the temple complex. Its management, however, continues to remain with the people who were managing it earlier.

The Bhoomika temple is situated only two kilometres outside the town of Katra. It is believed to be the temple where Shridhar used to worship the Goddess before she gave him Darshan and he began to proceed to the holy Shrine for performing Puja everyday. The Shrine Board has extensively developed this temple and the area around it. Similarly, the Shrine Board is currently developing the temple of Raghunath Ji at Katra and Mahadev temple at Reasi.

Kol kandoli, temple



Bhimgarh Fort, Reasi



Deva Mai temple

Bhoomika temple

MAJOR PROJECTS OF THE FUTURE

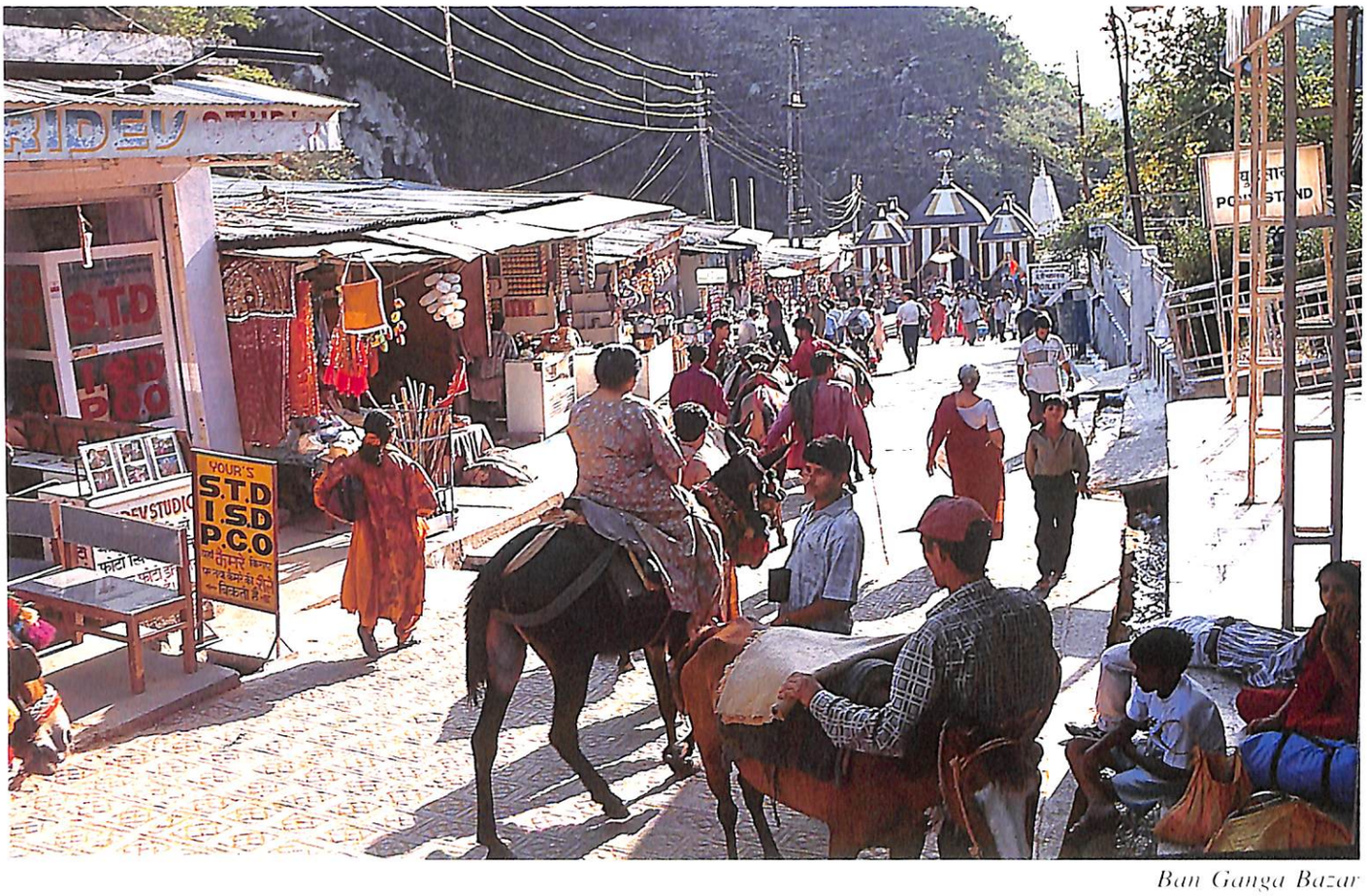
The major schemes which the Shrine Board proposes to implement in the future are as under:

1. Construction of a Queue Complex at Bhawan to accommodate 5000 pilgrims at a time.
2. Redesigning the area of Vaishno Devi Ji.
3. Construction of sewage treatment plants at Bhawan, Adhkwari and Banganga.
4. Construction of a ropeway between Bhawan and Bhairo Ghati.
5. Construction of additional accommodation for pilgrims at Bhawan.
6. Enhancing the availability of drinking water at Bhawan and at different stations enroute the holy Shrine.
7. Redeveloping the Adhkawari complex.
8. Construction of Shankaracharaya temple at Katra
9. Construction of dormitory accommodation at Katra.
10. Setting up a Technical University.
11. Setting up a Dogra heritage Centre cum Museum.

Setting up the Technical University and construction of the Queue Complex at Bhawan will, however, be very prestigious projects and will require a lot of time and money for completion.

The proposed Queue Complex, Bhawan

Plaza, Darshani Darwaza



Ban Ganga Bazar

INFORMATION FOR PILGRIMS

HOW TO REACH

Katra is located at a distance of 50 Kms. from Jammu, the summer capital of Jammu and Kashmir. Jammu is connected with the rest of the country by road, rail and air.

From The Rest of the Country to Jammu

Jammu is connected by air with Delhi and Srinagar. Indian Airlines operates a daily flight between Delhi and Jammu and Srinagar and Jammu. Indian Airlines also operates two flights a week between Jammu and Leh. Similarly, some private airlines like Jet Airlines also operate services between Delhi and Jammu.

Jammu is connected by rail with all the four corners of the country. Jammu is connected directly with Calcutta, Chennai, Kanyakumari, Mumbai, Ahmedabad, Bhopal, Hyderabad, Jaipur, Lucknow, Patna, Delhi etc. Indian Railways operates a very large number of trains with air-conditioned and ordinary coaches to and from Jammu every day.

Jammu is connected to the rest of the country by National Highway IA.

From Jammu to Katra

From Jammu to Katra is a distance of 50 Kms. Most of the distance is covered on National Highway IA and a part of the distance (15 Kms.) is over a secondary road which is maintained by Border Roads Organisation. Taxis are available at Jammu airport and Jammu railway station for carrying the pilgrims to Katra. The Jammu and Kashmir State Roadways Transport Corporation operates a large number of buses at regular intervals from Jammu railway station to Katra. Private deluxe buses also operate between Jammu railway station and Katra. Besides these, there is also a regular bus service between Jammu and Katra from the General Bus stand at Jammu. Buses leave for Katra after every fifteen minutes from the General Bus stand. The bus service commences at 6 AM and concludes at 8 PM.

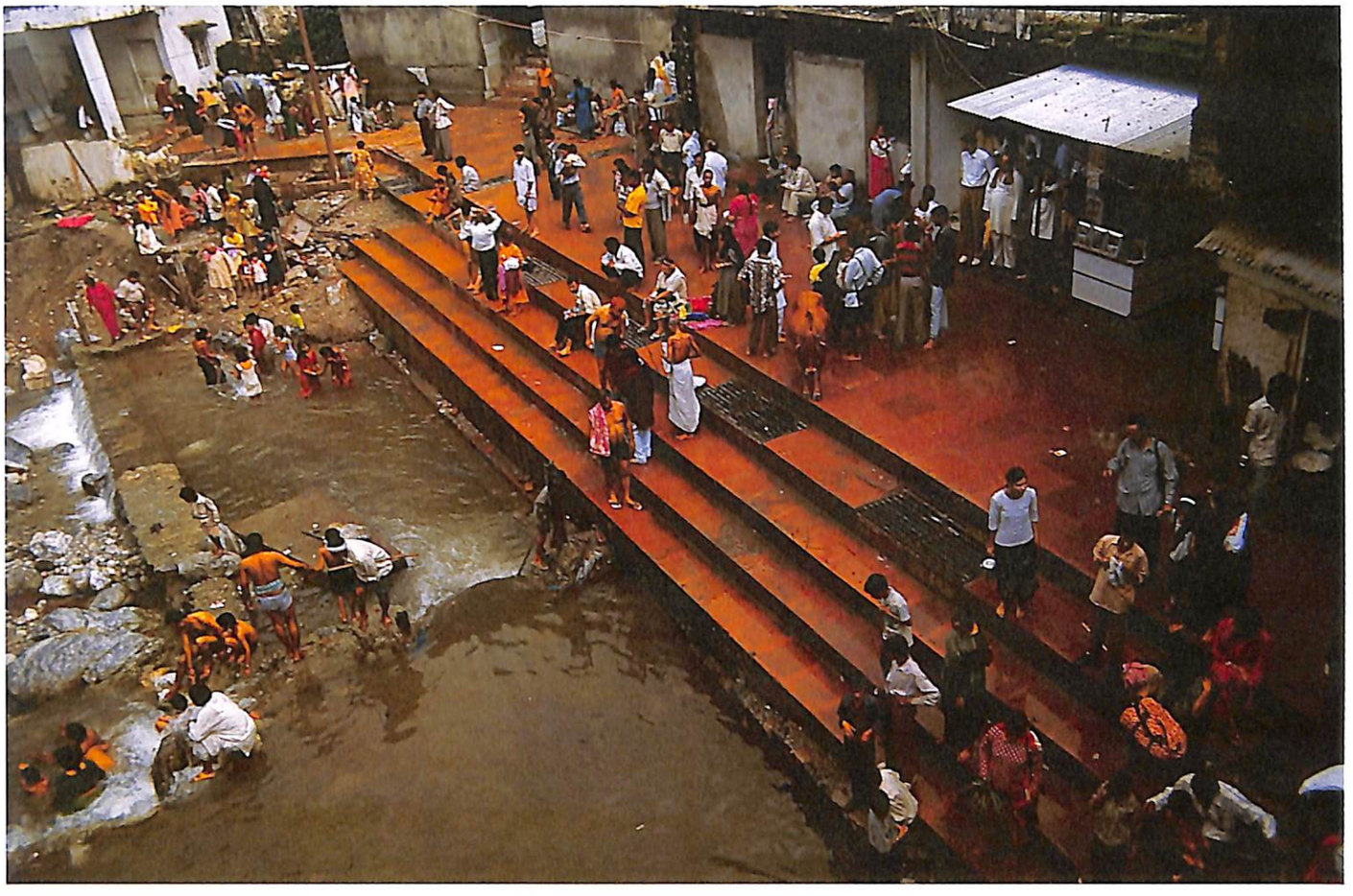
From Katra to Vaishno Devi Ji

I *YATRA PARCHI*

Once a pilgrim reaches Katra he has to obtain a yatra permit from the permit counter of Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine Board. The Permit counter is located adjacent to the Bus stand and the Taxi stand. The permit is known in local parlance as "Yatra Parchi" and the permit counter is known as "Yatra Parchi Counter". The counter remains open every day from 6 AM to 10 PM. About 18000 pilgrims are permitted to proceed every day on rush days from Katra to Vaishno Devi Ji. This includes 1000 personnel belonging to the Army and Air Force. The personnel from the Armed Forces obtain their Yatra Parchi from a separate counter which is located at a place known as Darshani Darwaza and is manned

by personnel belonging to the Army. A third counter is operated at the erstwhile Mulberry Nursery for the convenience of the pilgrims coming by chartered buses. It caters exclusively to such groups of pilgrims only. YATRA PARCHIS ARE GIVEN TO THE PILGRIMS FREE OF COST ON A FIRST COME FIRST SERVED BASIS. In case the number of pilgrims coming for Darshan on a particular day exceeds 18000, the remaining pilgrims are issued "Yatra Waiting Slips" from the same counters. Pilgrims carrying these slips are issued regular yatra parchis the next day. A maximum number of nine persons can be registered against one yatra parchi by the staff on duty. Each parchi contains the name of the leader of the party.His/her place of residence and the number of males, females and children in the group of nine. Children below five years of age are not entered in the yatra parchi. Corresponding entries are simultaneously made by the staff in the registers maintained by the Board to keep track of the pilgrimage. A senior officer of the Shrine Board sits at the counter to supervise and monitor things. A Group Number is allotted to each yatra parchi. 500 pilgrims comprise one group. Thus a total of 36 groups approximately can go for Darshan on a rush day. The allotment of group numbers helps to regulate the pilgrimage from the Yatra Parchi Counter and acts as a ready reckoner for the officers managing the Yatra.

Ban Ganga



Bathing Ghat, Ban Ganga

II *THE YATRA*

A) From Yatra Parchi Counter to Darshani Darwaza

Once a pilgrim is in possession of a yatra parchi he/she is eligible to proceed for the Yatra. The distance from the yatra parchi counter to DARSHANI DARWAZA (it is so named because it is the point from where the yatra is really deemed to commence and thus becomes the doorway or Darwaza for Darshan) is one kilometer. Pilgrims cover this stretch either on foot, or on auto rickshaws or by the bus service which is operated by the Shrine Board free of charge for the pilgrims.

B) From Darshani Darwaza to Banganga

The motorable road terminates at Darshani Darwaza. From there the pilgrim has to go forward either on foot or on a pony or on a PALKI or DANDI (Palanquin). The holy Shrine is located at a distance of twelve kilometers from Darshani Darwaza. The entire track from Darshani Darwaza to Vaishno Devi Ji is laid with cement tiles which are very comfortable to walk on. The track is also lit with sodium lights at night. Drinking water points, toilets, rain and sun shelters, refreshment units and vatikas have been provided at frequent intervals for the convenience of the pilgrims.

The first station beyond Darshani Darwaza is Banganga. Ponies and Palkis are available for hire at Banganga on rates fixed by the State Government. The Shrine Board has an office at Banganga which remains open round the clock for attending to and resolving the difficulties of the pilgrims. The Shrine Board also runs a First Aid Centre at Banganga. The

Police Department has set up a Police Post at Banganga. A large number of shops selling eatables and consumer items have come up at Banganga. They remain open round the clock. The yatra parchi is checked and stamped at the Banganga Check Post. This is done to prevent people who do not possess a yatra parchi from proceeding for the yatra. A PILGRIM MUST CROSS BANGANGA CHECK POST WITHIN SIX HOURS OF OBTAINING THE YATRA PARCHI. Banganga is only one and a half kilometre from the yatra parchi counter. The Banganga Check Post remains open round the clock.

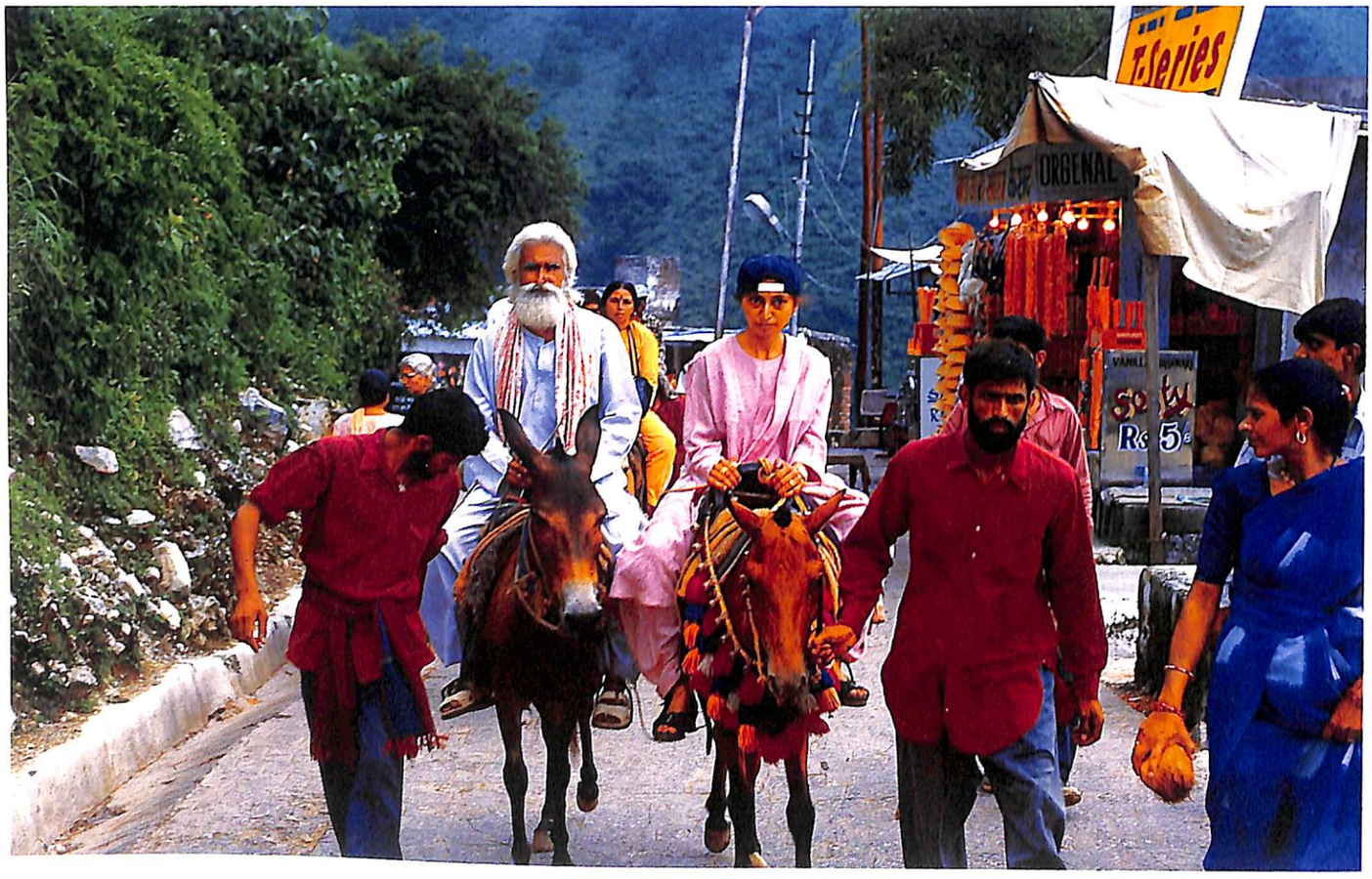
C) Banganga To Charan Paduka

Two and a half kilometers from Darshani Darwaza at a height of 3200 feet above sea level is the place known as Charan Paduka. There is an impression of Mata's feet on a rock at Charan Paduka. A small temple has been constructed over this rock at Charan Paduka. A number of shops selling snacks and cold drinks have come up at this place. The State Government runs a First Aid Centre here. The Shrine Board has set up a MAHILA MANDAL here.

D) Charan Paduka to Adhkawari

Six kilometers from Darshani Darwaza at a height of 4200 feet above sea level is the place known as Adhkawari.

The Shrine Board has constructed a large complex at Adhkawari. Free Dharmshalas, rooms on rent, a post office, a medical dispensary, a chemist shop, a bank, a pony stand and a large number of



Ageless fervour

shops are available at Adhkawari. The Shrine Board also runs a Bhojanalya at Adhkawari which is open round the clock every day. Hygienically cooked food at subsidized rates is available for the pilgrims from this Bhojanalya. Blankets are also available free of cost for the pilgrims at Adhkawari. A refundable security of Rs.100.00 per blanket has, however, to be deposited. The security is refunded to the pilgrim after he returns the blankets. The State Government has also set up a Police Post at Adhkawari. The Shrine Board's office at Adhkawari is open round the clock. An Announcement cum Information Counter also functions round the clock in a room adjacent to the office. Regular announcements are made from the Announcement Counter for the information of the pilgrims.

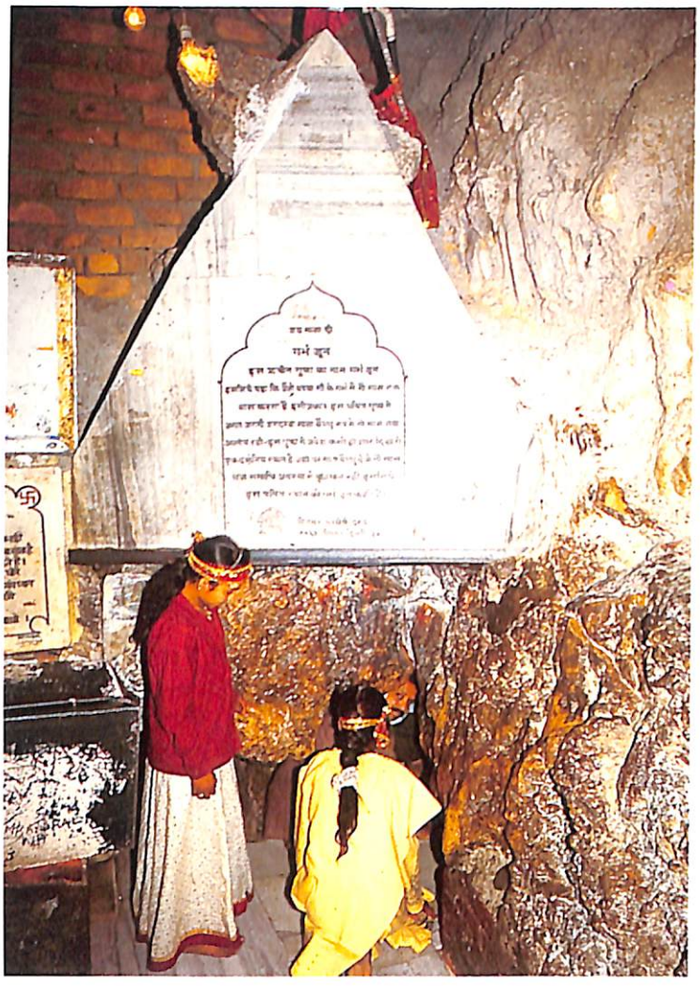
Pilgrims first go to the temple at Adhkawari and then enter the narrow cave known as Garbh Joon. At

Pilgrims resting under sheds

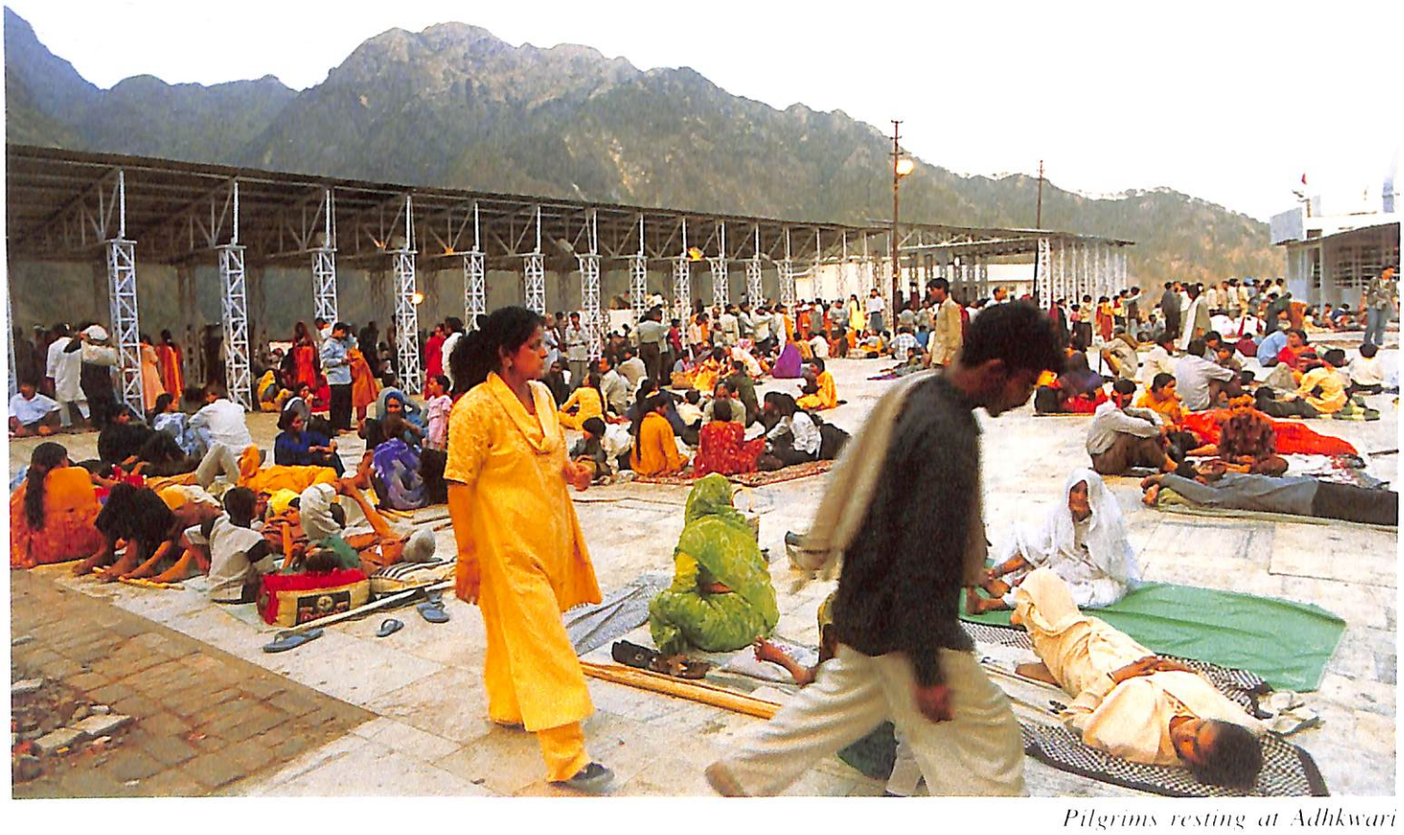
most places the cave is not more than two feet wide. Inspite of this people of all sizes are able to crawl through it.

E) Adhkawari to Sanji Chhat

Nine and a half kilometers from Darshani Darwaza lies Sanji Chhat at an altitude of 5870 feet above sea level. It is a delightful little plateau which affords a panoramic view of the Pir Panjal Range and the Chenab river wending its way majestically to Pakistan. At its feet, as it were, lies sprawled the town of Katra, the base camp of the yatra. Dharmshalas providing free accommodation, a shopping complex and a Bhojanalya of the Shrine Board are available here for the convenience of the pilgrims. Sanji Chhat also has a First Aid Centre. A very large hospital has also been constructed for the



Garabh Joon, entry



Pilgrims resting at Adhkwari

Shrine Board by the Sagar Suri Trust at Sanji Chhat. Two helipads have also been constructed at Sanji Chhat.

F) Sanji Chhat to Bhawan

Twelve kilometers from Darshani Darwaza and two and a half kilometers from Sanji Chhat lies the Holy Shrine of Mata Vaishno Devi Ji. It is located at an altitude of 5200 feet above seal level. The climb up the mountain ceases at Sanji Chhat. The track levels out and the pilgrims have to trek over a flat stretch for almost two kilometers before they begin to descend. The descent carries on for almost half a kilometre till one reaches the area of the holy Shrine - the destination of all the pilgrims who throng to Katra in thousands every day. There are a large number of Dharmshalas at Vaishno Devi Ji which provide free accommodation to the pilgrims. Blankets are also available for the pilgrims free of cost. Security has, however, to be deposited for taking the blankets. This security is refunded as soon as the blankets are returned to the blanket store. These blankets are regularly washed in the automatic laundry plant that has been installed by the Shrine Board at Vaishno Devi Ji. The Shrine Board also provides a few rooms on rent to the pilgrims at Vaishno Devi Ji. A large number of privately run shops serve food and snacks to the pilgrims. In addition, the Shrine Board runs a Bhojanalaya at Vaishno Devi Ji which is open round the clock. A medical dispensary, a chemist shop, a post office, a telephone exchange, two banks and a Police station also function at Vaishno Devi Ji. The Shrine is open for Darshan round the clock every day except for

Welcome burden

Sanji Chhat

First glimpse of Bhawan

Beyond Adhkwari

two hours in the morning (from 6 AM to 8 AM) and for two hours in the evening (from 6 PM to 8 PM) when the AARTI is performed.

What to wear

The holy Shrine of Mata Vaishno Devi Ji is located at an altitude of 5200 feet above sea level. Enroute one has to cross Sanji Chhat which lies at an altitude of 5870 feet above sea level. If a pilgrim decides to return to Katra via Bhairo Temple he has to climb to 6500 feet above sea level. All the three stations experience heavy snowfall during the months of December, January and February. Consequently, it can become extremely cold during winters Pilgrims are advised to carry heavy woollen clothing with them if they wish to perform the yatra during winters. In fact, HEAVY WOOLLEN CLOTHINGS SHOULD BE CARRIED BY PILGRIMS FROM OCTOBER TO MARCH. April is an unpredictable month. The weather can turn quite cold if it rains. So it is advisable to carry light woollens during this month. May to September are very pleasant months. One can get by with cotton clothes. Since the journey has to be performed primarily on foot it is advisable to wear canvas shoes or rubber soled shoes as they are comfortable to walk in. It is also useful to carry torches, raincoats and walking sticks. CANVAS SHOES, TORCHES, RAINCOATS AND WALKING STICKS CAN BE HIRED FROM A LARGE NUMBER OF SHOPS AT KATRA.

Where to stay at Jammu

Most of the pilgrims come to Jammu by train. Some of them come by chartered buses or interstate

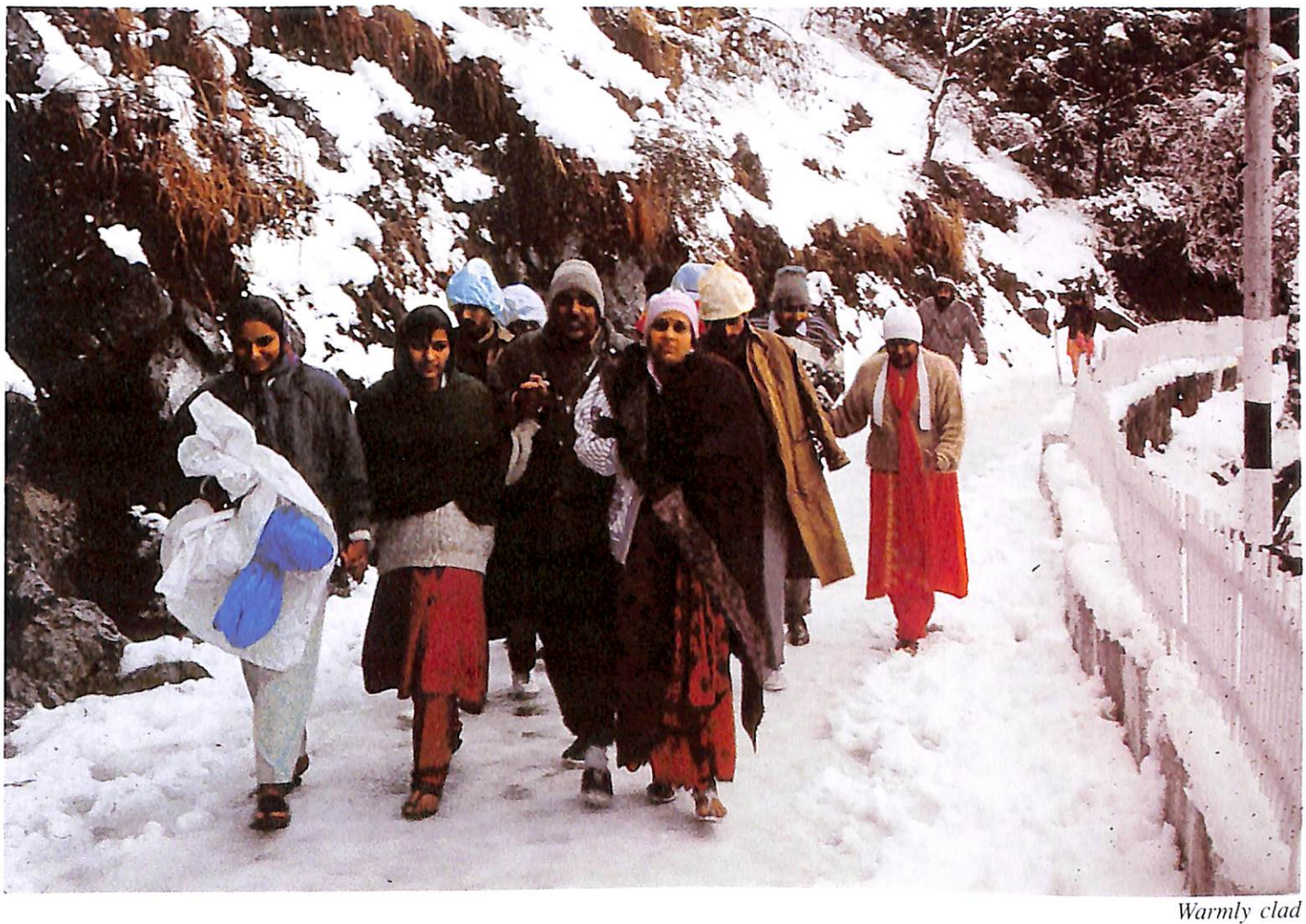
Winter

Hot Coffee and chips

buses. A few come by air. Those who come by chartered or interstate buses or by air usually proceed directly to Katra and on their way back also do not halt at Jammu. However, those pilgrims who come by train do halt at Jammu either on their way to Katra or while returning from there. Jammu has accommodation to suit every pocket. The range of accommodation runs the entire gamut from deluxe hotels to ordinary guest houses. The Shrine Board has also constructed a Dharmshala near the railway station at Jammu. It is known as VAISHNAVI DHAM. Dormitory accommodation is available for pilgrims at this Dharamshala at very reasonable rates. Blankets, linen and pillows are provided free of cost. Each dormitory is equipped with fans and a music system. Each floor of this building has toilet and bathing facilities separately for men and women. A restaurant serving vegetarian food at subsidised cost is also run in this Dharmshala for the convenience of the pilgrims. Apart from these facilities a cloak room, an STD PCO and a souvenir shop have also been provided in this building.

At Katra

A large number of hotels, guest houses and Dharmashalas have come up at Katra during the last few years. Today Katra can boast that it can provide accommodation for every class of pilgrims. There are A, B and C class hotels. In addition there are a large number of guest houses which provide budget



Warmly clad

class accommodation. Free accommodation is also available at Katra in a few Dharmshalas. The Shrine Board also provides accommodation for pilgrims at the NIHARIKA COMPLEX which is adjacent to the Bus stand.

Most of the A class hotels have the facility of in-house restaurants. Besides, the town also has a large number of restaurants and dhabhas which serve food at very reasonable rates. Two fast food restaurants have also come up at Katra in the last couple of years. ONLY VEGETARIAN FOOD IS SERVED TO THE GUESTS AT ALL THE EATING PLACES.

At Vaishno Devi Ji and enroute

Accommodation at Adhkawari, Sanji Chhat and Bhawan (Vaishno Devi Ji) is provided exclusively by the Shrine Board. Most of the accommodation is available free of cost. However, a few rooms are available at Adhkawari, Sanjichhat and Bhawan against payment of rent. THE FREE ACCOMMODATION IS AVAILABLE ON FIRST COME FIRST SERVED BASIS. RESERVATION FOR THE RENTED ACCOMMODATION IS DONE FROM THE CENTRAL OFFICE AT KATRA.

Vegetarian food and snacks are available at the dhabhas, restaurants and refreshment units which have been constructed at a large number of places all along the way to the Holy Shrine.

Where to give donations

The Shrine Board depends entirely on the donations of pilgrims for carrying out its developmental programmes. Therefore, pilgrims are requested to donate generously. Donations made to the Shrine Board are exempt from Income Tax under Section 80G of the Indian Income Tax Act. The following arrangements have been made for collecting the offerings and donations:

Donation boxes have been kept at the mouths of the original and the new cave, inside the holy cave near the sanctum sanctorum and immediately outside the exit cave. When the pilgrimage is less than 10,000 pilgrims per day, the pilgrims are permitted to enter the holy cave from the original cave. The staff on duty exhorts them to put their offerings in the donation box which has been placed just at the mouth of the tunnel as the Shrine Board does not permit the placing of offerings by the pilgrims at the sanctum sanctorum. This has been done keeping in mind the convenience of the pilgrims. If the pilgrims are encouraged to place their offerings at the sanctum sanctorum then they will need additional time to take out their offerings and place them before the holy Pindies. This would mean that the minimum time that must be allowed to a pilgrim at the sanctum sanctorum would have to be increased. As a consequence, a lesser number of pilgrims would be able to have DARSHAN of the holy Pindies per day than at present. In view of the fact that the number of pilgrims coming to Vaishno Devi Ji is rising rapidly every year, it is not possible to increase the time allotted for Darshan as it would further increase the duration of the waiting period for the yatris. This is not acceptable to most pilgrims in view of the fact that they have a limited time at their disposal. Any further increase in the period of

waiting would cause a lot of inconvenience to them.

Whenever the pilgrimage is more than 10000 pilgrims per day, the pilgrims are taken for Darshan through the new tunnel. A donation box each has been placed at the entrance to the new tunnel and the junction of the new tunnel and the traditional tunnel. The pilgrims are exhorted to put their donation in these donation boxes. A donation box has also been placed just outside the exit tunnel. This has been done for the convenience of such pilgrims who may forget to put their offerings in either of the other two donation boxes. A jewellery box has also been placed at the sanctum sanctorum. The gold and silver jewellery offered by the pilgrims is put in the jewellery box. The offerings so collected, the jewellery box and the donation box kept at the sanctum sanctorum are thereafter carried to the Counting Room for being counted by the Sub-Divisional Magistrate, the Accounts Officer, the Security Officer of the Shrine Board and a small contingent of police-men detailed for this duty. The counting room is guarded round the clock by armed policemen. The room is double locked and the keys of the locks are kept with the SDM and the Accounts Officer respectively. The Counting Room can be opened only when both the officers open one lock each. A Closed Circuit Television System has been installed in the counting room. Cameras record all activities that take place inside the room and images are flashed on the TV screens which have been installed at a number of places.

The staff on counting duty is frisked by the police before they are permitted to enter the room and they have to leave whatever they are carrying outside the counting room. The time of entry is recorded and then the room is locked once again. The counting of cash and the weighing of gold and

Gauri Bhawan (Vaishno Devi Ji)

Vaishnavi Dham, Jammu

silver jewellery commences thereafter. On an average the process takes about eight to ten hours. Once the counting is complete the staff of the Jammu and Kashmir Bank comes, counts the cash, gives a receipt to the staff of the Shrine Board and carries the cash to the bank. The gold and silver ornaments are, however, retained in the counting room which also functions as the Strong Room.

Niharika, Katra

Offerings being counted

ANNEXURES

THE JAMMU AND KASHMIR SHRI MATA VAISHNO DEVI SHRINE ACT, 1986

(Act No. XXIII of 1986)

CONTENTS

In exercise of the powers vested by virtue of Proclamation No. P-1/86 dated 7th March, 1986, issued under section 92 of the Constitution of Jammu and Kashmir, the Governor is pleased to enact as follows :

1. **Short title and commencement** : 1. This Act may be called the Jammu and Kashmir Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine Act, 1986.

2. It shall come into force at once.

2. **Act to over-ride other laws** : This Act shall have effect, notwithstanding anything to the contrary contained in any law or in any scheme of management, decree, custom, usage or instrument.

3. **Definitions** : In this act , unless the context otherwise requires:

(a) "Board" means the Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine Board constituted under this Act;

(b) "Endowment" means all property, movable or immovable, belonging to, or given or endowed for the maintenance, improvement, additions to or worship in the Shrine or for the performance of any service or charity connected therewith and includes the idols installed therein, the premises of the Shrine and gifts of property made to any one within the percinets of the Shrine and lands and buildings attached, or appurtenant thereto, beginning from Katra up to the holy cave and the adjoining hillocks currently under the management of Dharmarth Trust or property belonging to Baridar or Baridars Association within the area specified in the premable of this Act.

(c) "Shrine Fund": means the endowment and includes all sums received by or on behalf of, or for the time being held for the benefit of the Shrine, and also includes all the endowments which have been or may hereafter be made for the benefit of the Shrine of any other deity, thereof in the name of any person, or for the convenience comfort or benefit of the pilgrims thereto, as well as also offerings made to any of the deities comprised in the Shrine;

(d) The "Shrine" means the Shrine of Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine and includes the Shrine, holy cave and other temples within premises specified in the preamble of this Act;

(e) "Prescribed" means prescribed by bye-laws made under this Act.

4. **Vesting of Shrine Fund** : The ownership of the Shrine Fund shall, from the commencement of this Act, vest in the Board and the Board shall be entitled to its possession, administration and use for the purposes of this Act.

5. **The Board** : (1) The administration, management and governance of Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine and the Shrine Fund shall vest in a Board comprising a Chairman and not more than ten members. The composition of the Board shall be as follows :

(a) The Governor of the State Jammu and Kashmir shall be the ex-officio Chairman of the Board, and if the Governor be not a Hindu, then he may nominate an eminent person professing Hindu religion and qualified to be a member;

(b) Dr. Karan Singh, the present sole Trustee of the Dharmarth Trust will be the Vice-Chairman of the Board for the life;

(c) Nine persons to be nominated by the Governor of Jammu and Kashmir in the following manner:

(1) One nominee of the Dharmarth Trust.

(2) One person from the erstwhile Baridars.

(3) Two persons who in the opinion of the Governor, have distinguished themselves in the service of Hindu religion or culture;

(4) Two women who in the opinion of the Governor, have distinguished themselves in the service of the Hindu religion, culture or social work, especially in regard to advancement of women;

(5) Three persons out of persons who have distinguished themselves in administration, legal affairs or financial matters.

Provided that during the period not exceeding three months from the commencement of this Act, the Governor shall act as and exercise all the powers of the Board under this Act.

(2) A person shall not be eligible for being nominated as a member, or for being a member of the Board if he suffers or incurs any of the disqualifications specified in section 8.

6. **Incorporation** : The Board shall be a body corporate and shall have perpetual succession and common seal and may be said name sue and be sued.

7. **Term of office of the members** : The members of the Board other than the Chairman and the Vice-Chairman, shall subject to the provisions of section 8 and 9, hold office for a term of three years form the date of their nomination under section 5.

8. **Disqualification for membership of Board** : A person shall be disqualified for being appointed, as a member of the Board.

(a) If such person is not a Hindu;

(b) If he is of unsound mind and stands so declared by a competent court or if he is the deaf mute, or is suffering from contagious leprosy or any virulent contagious disease;

(c) If he is an undischarged insolvent;

(d) If he is appearing as a legal practitioner against Board;

(e) If he is sentenced by a criminal court for an offense involving moral turpitude, such sentence not having been reversed;

(f) If in the opinion of the Governor he has acted against the interests of the Shrine;

(g) If he is an office-holder or servant attached to the Board, provided that nothing in this clause shall apply to the Chief Executive Officer of the Board;

(h) If he has been guilty of corruption or misconduct in the administration of the Shrine;

(i) If he has addicted to intoxicating liquors or drugs.

9. **Dissolution and Supersession of the Board** : (1) If in the opinion of the Governor, the Board is not competent to perform, or presistently makes default in performing the duties imposed on it under this Act or exceeds or abuses its powers, the Governor may after due enquiry and/after giving the Board reasonable opportunity of being heard, by order dissolve or supersede the Board and reconstitute another Board in accordance with this Act.

(2) Where a Board is dissolved superseded under this section, the Governor shall assume all the powers and perform all the functions and exercise all the powers of the Board for a period not exceeding three months or until the constitution of another Board whichever is earlier.

10. **Filling up of vacancies** : (1) Casual vacancies in the office of the Board shall be filled in the same way as provided in section 5.

(2) The term of a member nominated to fill a casual vacancy shall expire on the day on which the term of the member in whose vacancy the appointment has been made would have expired.

(3) Nothing done by the Board shall be invalid by reason only of there being a casual vacancy.

11. **Resignation** : Any member may resign his office as member by giving notice in writing to the Chief Executive Officer and his office shall become vacant from the date of acceptance of the same by the Governor.

12. **Removal of a member** : The Governor may, for good and sufficient reason, remove any member, except the Vice-Chairman, after giving him an opportunity of showing cause against such removal and after considering the explanation offered therefor.

13. **Office and meetings of the Board** : (1) The Board shall maintain its office at such place as the Board may decide.

(2) At the meeting of the Board, the Chairman or in his absence of Vice-Chairman or in the absence of both, one of the members for the purpose to be elected at the meeting shall preside.

(3) No business shall be transacted at any meeting unless at least four members are present.

(4) Every decision of the Board shall, except as expressly provided by this Act, be by a majority of votes, and in case of equality of votes, the person presiding shall have a second or casting vote.

14. **Appointment of officers and servants of the Board :** (1) For the efficient discharge of the functions assigned to it under this Act, the Board may appoint a Chief Executive Officer and such other officers and servants as it considers necessary with such designations, pay, allowances and other remunerations and pre-requisities as the board may determine from time to time :
Provided that the Chief Executive Officer of the Board will not be less in rank than a Distt Magistrate of the district and the Chief Accounts Officer not less in rank than Deputy Director of Accounts.

(2) The Chairman of the Board, subject to any bye-laws made under this Act, shall have the power to transfer suspend, remove or dismiss any officer or servant of the Board for the breach of discipline, for carelessness, unfitness, neglect of duty or misconduct of for any other sufficient cause:
Provided that where the officer or the servant is a Government servant, he may be reverted to his parent cadre or Department in the Government.

15. **Officers and servants of the Board to be public servants :** The Members, officers and servants of the Board shall, while acting or purporting to act in pursuance of the provisions of this Act or any bye-laws made thereunder, be deemed to be public servants within the meaning of section 21 of the State Ranbir Penal Code;

16. **Liability of members :** (1) Every member of the Board shall be liable for the loss, waste or mis-application of Shrine Fund if such loss,waste or mis-application is a direct consequence of his wilful act or ommission while as member and a suit for compensation may be instituted against him by the Board.

17. **Alienation of movable and immovable property:** (1) No jewellery or other valuable property of non-perishable nature forming part of the Shrine Fund shall be transferred without the previous sanction of the Board.
(2) No land or other immovable property held by the Board shall be alienated except by a resolution of the Board.

18. **Limitation of Borrowing power and landing:** No money shall be borrowed or lent except by a resolution of the Board.

19. **Duties of the Board :** Subject to the provision of this Act and of any bye-laws made thereunder, it shall be the duty of the Board :

(1) To arrange for the proper performance of worship at the shrine;

(2) To provide facilities for the proper performance of worship by pilgrims;

(3) To make arrangements for the safe custody of the funds, valuable security and jewellery and for the preservation of the Shrine fund;

(4) To undertake for the benefit of worshippers and pilgrims -

(a) the construction of buildings for their accommodation;

(b) the construction of sanitary works; and

(c) the improvement of means of communication;

(5) to undertake the development activities concerning the area of the Shrine and its surroundings;

(6) to make suitable arrangements for the imparting of religious instructions and general educations;

(7) to make provision of medical relief for worshippers and pilgrims;

(8) to make provision for the payment of suitable emoluments to the salaried staff;

(9) to do all such things for as may be incidental and conductive to the efficient management, maintenance and administration of the Shrine and Shrine Funds and the convenience of the pilgrims.

20 **Rights of Baridars and other persons :** (1) All rights of Baridars shall stand extinguished from the date of commencement of this Act :
Provided that the Governor may appoint a Tribunal who, after giving personal hearing to the Baridars and the representatives of the Board, shall recommend compensation to be paid by the Board in lieu of extinction of their rights. While making its recommendations to the Board, the Tribunal shall have due regared to the income which the Baridars had been deriving as Baridars.
Provided further that where a Baridar surrenders his right to compensation and offers himself for employment of the Board, the Board shall cause his suitability for such employment to be adjudged and may offer him employment in case he is found suitable by the Selection Committee to be appointed for the purpose subject to the Baridar giving an undertaking to abide by the administrative and disciplinary control of the Board in accordance with the bye-laws framed by the Board.
(2) All such employees of the Dharmarth Trust as are engaged on any function connected with the Shrine shall, unless they exercise an option to the contrary, be deemed to have become the employees of the Board on the commencement of this Act and would be subject to the administrative and disciplinary control of the Board. Their terms and conditions of service shall be regulated by the bye-laws framed by the Board which will, as far as practicable, not be inferior than the present level of remuneration and other terms and conditions of their service.

3. The shopkeeper and other lease holders, who are tenants of the Dharmarth Trust, in the area referred to in the Act will become tenants of the Board.

21. **Bar to suits or proceedings :** No suit or proceedings shall lie in any count against the Board or its officers for anything or purported to be done in good faith by it under this Act.

22. **Grant to Dharmarth Trust :** The Board will set apart each year an amount approximating to net income derived by the Dharmarth Trust from the Shrine which may be disbursed to the Trust. For this purpose, the net income accruing to the Dharmarth Trust shall be derived from the certified accounts of the most recent accounting year of the Trust for which such accounts duly certified by the Chartered Accountants exist.

23. **Power to make bye laws :** The Board may make bye-laws not inconsistent with this Act.

(a) the entrustment of duties and functions of the Chief Executive Officer of the Board;

(b) the manner in which decision of the Board may be taken otherwise than at the meetings;

(c) the procedure and conduct of the business at meetings of the Board;

(d) the delegation of powers of the Board to individual member or to committees;

(e) the books and accounts to be kept at the office of the Board;

(f) the custody and investment of the Shrine Fund;

(g) the details to be included in the Budget of the Board;

(h) the time and place of meetings;

(i) the manner in which notice of its meetings shall be given;

(j) the preservation of order and the conduct of the proceedings at meetings and the powers which the Chairman may exercise for the purpose of enforcing its dedcision;

(k) the manner in which proceedings of the Board shall be recorded and published;

(l) the persons by whom receipts may be granted for moneys paid to the Board;

(m) the maintenance of order inside the Shrine and regulating the entry of persons therein;

(n) the performance of duties provided in section 19; and

(o) all other matters expressly required or which may be required for carrying out the purposes of this Act.

24. **Audit and Annual Report :** (1) The Accounts of the Board for the financial year shall be audited annually by the Charterd Accountant to be nominated by the Board.

(2) The Board shall annually prepare a report on the administration of the affairs of the Shrine and publish it for inforamtion of the public.

25. **Arbirtration :** If any dispute arises between Dharmarth Trust and the Board, the same shall be referred for arbirtration by a person to be nominated by the Governor.

JAGMOHAN
GOVERNOR

(Sd.) A.R.DAR,
Dy Legal Remembrancer

THE JAMMU AND KASHMIR SHRI MATA VAISHNO DEVI SHRINE ACT, 1988

(Act No. XVI of 1988)

Received the assent of the Governor on 31st August, 1988 and is hereby published for general information

An Act to provide for the better management, administration and governance of Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine and its endowments including the lands and buildings attached, or appurtenant, to the Shrine, beginning from Katra up to the holy cave and the adjoining hillocks currently under the management of Dharmarth Trust.

Be it enacted by the Jammu & Kashmir State Legislature in the Thrity-ninth Year of the Republic of India as follows :

1. **Short title and commencement :** (1) This Act may be called the Jammu and Kashmir Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine Act, 1988.

(2) It shall be deemed to have come to force with effect from 30-08-1986.

2. **Act to over-ride other laws :** This Act shall have effect, notwithstanding anything to the contrary contained in any law or in any scheme of management, decree, custom, usage or instrument.

3. **Definitions :** Inthis Act, unless the context otherwise requires:

(a) "Board" means the Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine Board constituted under this Act.

(b) "Endowment" means all property, movable, or immovable, belonging to, or given or endowed for the maintenance, improvement, addition to or worship in the Shrine or for the performance of any service or charity connected therewith and includes the idols installed therein, the premises of the Shrine and gifts of property made to anyone within the percinets of the Shrine and lands and buildings attached or appurtenant thereto, beginning from Katra up to the holy cave and the adjoining hillocks currently under the management of Dharmarth Trust or property belonging to Baridar or Baridars Association within the area specified in the preamble of this Act.

(c) "Shrine Fund" means the endowment and includes all sums received by or on behalf of, or for the time being held for the benefit of the Shrine, and also includes all the endowments which have been or may hereafter be made for the benefit of the Shrine of any other deity thereof in the name of any person, or for the convenience, comfort or benefit of the pilgrims thereto, as well as offerings made to any of the deities comprised in the Shrine;

(d) The "Shrine" means the Shrine of Shri Mata Vaishno Devi and includes the Shrine, holy cave and other temples within premises specified in the preamble of this Act.

(e) "Prescribed" means prescribed by bye-laws made under this Act.

4. **Vesting of Shrine Fund :** The ownership of the Shrine Fund, shall from the commencement of this Act, vest in the Board and the Board shall be entitled to its possession, administration and use for the purposes of this Act.

5 **The Board -** (1) The administration, management and governance of Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine and the Shrine Fund shall vest in a Board comprising a Chairman and not more than ten members. The composition of the Board shall be as follows:

(a) The Governor of the State Jammu and Kashmir shall be the ex-officio Chairman of the Board, and if the Governor be not a Hindu, then he may nominate an eminent person professing Hindu religion and qualified to be a member.

(b) Nine persons to be nominated by the Governor of Jammu and Kashmir in the following manner-

(i) Two persons who, in the opinion of the Governor, have distinguished themselves in the service of Hindu religion or culture.

(ii) Two women, who in the opinion of the Governor have distinguished themselves in the service of Hindu religion, culture or social work, especially in regard to advancement of women.

(iii) Three persons out of persons who have distinguished themselves in the administration, legal affairs or financial matters.

(iv) Two eminent Hindus of the State of Jammu and Kashmir.

Provided that during the period not exceeding three months from the commencement of this Act, the Governor shall act as and exercise all the powers of the Board under this Act.

(2) A person shall not be eligible for being nominated as a member, or for being a member of the Board if he suffers or incurs any of the disqualifications specified in section 8.

6. **Incorporation :** The Board shall be a body corporate and shall have perpetual succession and common seal and may be said name sue and be sued.

7. **Term of office of the members :** The members of the Board other than the Chairman, shall subject to the provision of section 8 and 9, hold office for a term of three years from the date of their nomination under section 5.

8. **Disqualification for membership of Board:** A person shall be disqualified for being appointed, as a member of the Board.

(a) If such person is not a Hindu.

(b) If he is of unsound mind and stands so declared by a competent court or if he is a deaf mute, or is suffering from contagious leprosy or any virulent contagious disease.

(c) If he is an undischarged insolvent.

(d) If he is appearing as a legal practitioner against the Board.

(e) If he is sentenced by a criminal court for an offence involving moral turpitude, such sentence not having been reversed.

(f) If in the opinion of the Governor he has acted against the interests of the Shrine.

(g) If he is an office-holder or servant attached to the Board, provided that nothing in this clause shall apply to the Chief Executive Officer of the Board.

(h) If he has been guilty of corruption or misconduct in the administration of the Shrine.

(i) If he has addicted to intoxicating liquors or drugs.

9. **Dissolution and Suppersession of the Board :** (1) If in the opinion of the Governor, the Board is not competent to perform, or persistently makes default in performing the duties impressed on it under this Act or exceeds or abuses its powers, the Governor may after due enquiry giving the Board reasonable opportunity of being heard, by order dissolve or supersede the Board and reconstitute another Board in accordance with this Act.

(2) Where a Board is dissolved superseded under this section, the Governor shall assume all the powers and perform all the functions and exercise all the powers of the Board for a period not exceeding three months or until the constitution of another Board whichever is earlier.

10. **Filling of vacancies :** (1) Casual vacancies in the office of the Board shall be filled in the same way as provided in section 5.

(2) The term of a member nominated to fill a casual vacancy shall expire on the day on which the term of the member in whose vacancy the appointment has been made would have expired.

(3) Nothing done by the Board shall be invalid by reason only of there being a casual vacancy.

11. **Resignation :** Any member may resign his office as member by giving notice in writing to the Chief Executive Officer and his office shall become vacant from the date of acceptance of the same by the Governor.

12. **Removal of a member :** The Governor may, for good and sufficient reason, remove any member after giving him an opportunity of showing cause against such removal and after considering the explanation offered therefor.

13. **Office and meetings of the Board :** (1) The Board shall maintain its office at such place as the Board may decided.

(2) At the Board, the Chairman or in his absence one of the members for the purpose to be elected at the meeting, shall preside.

(3) No business shall be transacted at any meeting unless at least four

members are present.

(4) Every decision of the Board shall, except as expressly provided by this Act, be by a majority of votes, and in case of equality of votes the person presiding shall have a second or casting vote.

14. **Appointment of officers and servants of the Board :** (1) For the efficient discharge of the functions assigned to it under this Act, the Board may appoint a Chief Executive Officer and such other officers and servants as it considers necessary with designations, pay, allowances and other remuneration and pre-requisites as the Board may determine from time to time.

Provided that the Chief Executive Officer of the Board will not be less in rank of Distt Magistrate of District and the Chief Accounts Officer not less in rank than a Deputy Director of Accounts.

(2) The Chairman of the Board, subject to any bye-laws made under this Act, shall have the power to transfer, suspend, remove or dismiss any officer or servant of the Board for the breach of discipline, for carelessness, unfitness, neglect of duty or misconduct of for any other sufficient cause :

Provided that where the officer or the servant is a Government servant, he may be reverted to his parent cadre or Department in the Government.

15. **Officers and servants of the Board to be public servants:** The Members, Officers and servants of the Board shall while acting or purporting to act in pursuance of the provisions of this Act or any bye-laws made thereunder be deemed to be public servants within the meaning of section 21 of the State Ranbir Penal Code.

16. **Liability of Members :** Every member of Board shall be liable for the loss, waste or mis-application of Shrine Fund if such loss, waste or mis-applicaiton is a direct consequence of his wilful act or omission while as member and a suit for compensation may be instituted against him by the Board.

17. **Alienation of movable and immovable property:** (1) No jewellery or other valuable property of non-perishable nature forming part of the Shrine Fund shall be transferred without the previous sanction of the Board.

(2) No land or other immovable property held by the Board shall be alienated except by a resolution of the Board.

18. **Duties of the Board :** Subject to the provision of their Act and of any bye-laws made thereunder, it shall be the duty of the Board

(1) To arrange for the proper performance of worship at the shrine.

(2) To provide facilities for the proper performance of worship by the pilgrims.

(3) To make arrangements for the safe custody of the funds, valuable security and jewellery and for the preservation of the Shrine Fund.

(4) To undertake for the benefit of worshippers and pilgrims :

(a) The construction of buildings for their accommodation ;

(b) The construction of sanitary work; and

(c) The improvement of communication;

(5) To undertake the development activities concerning the area of the Shrine and its surroundings.

(6) To make suitable arrangements for the importing of religious instructions and general education.

(7) To make provision of medical relief for worshippers and pilgrims.

(8) To make provision for the payment of suitable emoluments to the salaried staff.

(9) To do all such things for as may be incidental and conducive to the efficient management, maintenance and administration of the Shrine and the Shrine Fund and the convenience of the pilgrims.

19. **Rights of Baridars and other persons :** (1) All rights of Baridars shall stand extinguished from the date of commencement of this Act.

Provided that the Governor may appoint a Tribunal which after giving personal hearing to the Baridars and the representatives of the Board, shall recommend compensation to be paid by the Board in lieu of extinction of their rights. While making its recommendations to the Board, the tribunal shall have due regard to the income which the Baridars had been deriving as Baridars. The Board shall examine the recommendations forwarded to it by the Tribunal and take such decision as it may deem appropriate. The decision of the Board shall be final.

Provided further that where a Baridar surrenders his right to compensation and offers himself for employment of the Board, the Board shall cause his suitability for such employment to be adjudged and may offer him employment in case he is found suitable by the selection committee to be appointed for the purpose subject to the Baridar giving an undertaking to abide by the administrative and disciplinary control of the Board in accordance with the bye-laws framed by the Board.

(2) All such employees of the Dharmarth Trust as are engaged on any function connected with the Shrine shall, unless they exercise an option to the contrary, be deemed to have become the employees of the Board on the commencement of this Act and would be subject to the administrative and disciplinary control of the Board. Their terms and conditions of service shall be regulated by the bye-laws framed by the Board which will, as far as practicable, not be inferior than the present level of remuneration and other terms and conditions of their service.

3. The shopkeepers and other lease holders, who are the tenants of the Dharmarth Trust in the area referred to in the Act will become tenants of the Board.

20. **Bar to suit or proceedings :** No suit or other proceedings shall lie in any court against the Board or its officers for anything done purported to be done in good faith by it under this Act.

21. **Grant to religious institutions :** The Board may make grants in favour of any institution for religious spiritual purpose.

22. **Audit and Annual Report :** (1) The Accounts of the Board for the financial year shall be audited annually by the Chartered Accountants to be nominated by the Board.

(2) The Board shall annually prepare a report on the administration of the affairs of the Shrine publish it for information of the public.

23. **Arbitration :** If any dispute arises between Dharmarth trust and the Board, the same shall be refered for arbitration by a person to be nominated by the Governor.

24. **Powers to make by laws :** The Board may make bye-laws not inconsistent with this Act for :

(a) the entrustment of duties and functions of the Chief Executive Officer of the Board;

(b) the manner in which decision of the Board may be taken otherwise than at the meetings;

(c) the procedure and conduct of business at meetings of the Board;

(d) the delegation of powers of the Board to individual members or to committees.

(e) the books and accounts to be kept at the office of the Board;

(f) the custody and investment of the Shrine Fund;

(g) the details to be included in the Budget of the Board;

(h) the time and place of meetings;

(i) the manner in which notice of its meeting shall be given;

(j) the preservation of order and the conduct of the proceedings at meetings and the powers which the Chairman may exercise for the purpose of enforcing its decision;

(k) the manner in which proceedings of the Board shall be recorded and published;

(l) the persons by whom receipts may be granted for moneys paid to the Board;

(m) the maintenance of order inside the Shrine and regulating the entry of persons therein;

(n) the performance of duties provided in section 19; and

(o) all other matter expressly required or which may be required for carrying out the purposes of this Act.

25. **Repeal** : The Jammu and Kashmir Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine Act, 1986 (Governor's Act No. XXIII of 1986) is hereby repealed.

THE MANAGEMENT BEFORE THE TAKE OVER BY THE BOARD

For hundreds of years after its discovery by PANDIT SHRIDHAR the holy shrine continued to remain shrouded in obscurity. Even though the Trikuta mountain was a prominent landmark on the horizon and could be seen from almost seventy to eighty kilometers on a clear day, the remoteness of the area, the ruggedness of the terrain and the dense forests which lay enroute discouraged people from venturing near. We should also remember that no roads or any other kind of communication net work existed in the area in those days. Besides, the population in the Jammu region in those days was also sparse; so the holy shrine languished in obscurity. Those who went up the mountain fastness to worship Her continued to be either Sadhus or the people residing in the surrounding villages.

Gradually, however, from the sixteenth century onwards, word of the existence of the Holy Shrine of Vaishno Devi Ji on the Trikuta mountain began to filter out. And with the passage of time some religiously inclined people began to venture up the mountain for Darshan. Most of the new devotees came from the plains of Punjab. This was quite natural because Punjab lay in close proximity to Jammu and Akhnoor and most of the trade of the region was carried on through the river Chenab which flowed through Punjab. Thus, slowly the glory of the Goddess began to spread out of the confines of the mountains and the pilgrims visiting the Holy Shrine now began to regularly include not only the inhabitants of the surrounding areas and Sadhus but also a few traders from the plains and a few others who would come to seek Her blessings or make a vow or fulfil a vow. The Baridars, however, continued to collect the offerings and blithely continued to ignore their responsibility for providing some kind of facilities to the pilgrims. Gradually, the rush of pilgrims began to grow and the belief spread that the pilgrimage to the Shrine, though auspicious in itself at any time of the year, was especially auspicious during the Navratras falling in the months of March /April and Sept./October of the Gregorian calendar. As a consequence, the Holy Shrine began to witness a lot of rush during the Navratra festivals. There were, however, no arrangements for looking after the people who came to the Shrine during these days. There were neither any shelters nor any places serving food to the pilgrims. This often led to quarrels and some times serious fights also broke out either among the pilgrims or between the pilgrims and the Baridars. Thus things were quite disorganised when Gulab Singh became the Maharaja of Jammu and Kashmir.

Initially, Maharaja Gulab Singh did not interfere in the happenings at the Holy Shrine and the Baridars continued to enjoy the benefit of the offerings without contributing anything for improving the state of affairs. However, frequent reports of Sadhus rioting at the Shrine due to inadequate arrangements for their stay and food compelled Maharaja Gulab Singh to take some action. So, in the year 1907 Bikrami corresponding to 1849-50 AD of the Gregorian calendar, he prescribed an amount of Rs. 1150 per annum as rent which was to be paid by the Baridars for the management of the stay and meals for Sadhus visiting the Shrine. This amount was to be deposited by the Baridars into the State Treasury. Thereafter, in 1920 Bikrami another Rs.100 were added to the above amount and thus Rs.1250 per annum were fixed as the rent which was to be deposited into the Government Treasury by the Baridars.

After 1940 Bikrami, this amount of Rs.1250 per annum began to be deposited with the Dharmarth which was a separate organisation set up by the Maharaja (and this arrangement continued till 1986 A.D.). This amount, however, used to be recovered only from the Thakkar Baridars and not the Brahman Baridars. The Baridars collected this amount by deducting a portion of the share of the offerings due to each category of Baridars. The Thakkar Baridars were also made liable by the Maharaja to provide three permanent servants (and six additional servants during the rush period) for making arrangements for the yatra. Their charges had to be paid by the Baridars. The Baridars were also made responsible for arranging the *prasad* and having it carried from Katra to the Vaishno Devi Shrine. In addition, the Thakkar Baridars were made responsible for looking after the cows of the Dharmarth and for taking them from one place to another. The Dharmarth also made the Thakkar Baridars responsbile for arranging the carriage of the luggage etc. of any Government Servant who visited the Shrine. The Thakkar Baridars were further made liable for performing the following duties: (a) Cleaning the Holy Cave and the compound appurtenant to it. (b) Carrying the Puja material into the Holy Cave alongwith the Pujari. (c) If during the mela season any pilgrim fell ill or there was some other problem, the Baridars had to evacuate the sick pilgrim and take steps for resolving the problem.

In order to further streamline things, the Dharmarth [which had been set up by Maharaja Gulab Singh around 1903 (Bikrami)] subsequently decided that each Baridar should pay the rent prescribed by the Maharaja to Dharmarth every year before he would be permitted to carry away his share of the offerings. Any Baridar who refused or evaded the payment of rent to Dharmarth would not be entitled to receive his share of the offerings which would be attached and deposited with the Manager, Dharmarth. The Baridar whose share had been thus attached could retrieve his share only on payment of the rent due from him to the Dharmarth Trust. The Dharmarth also decided that in case any Baridar or his legal representative could not come in person to deposit his share with the Manager, Dharmarth, it would be the duty of his other co-sharers to deposit the absentee's share. And when the absentee Baridar presented himself later on, the Manager, Dharmarth would, after deducting the dues, if any, from him to the Dharmarth, pay his share to him. The Dharmarth also agreed that if the Baridars adhered to all the stipulations laid down from time to time, it would duly recognise the fact that no person other than Baridars (i.e. four sub- castes) would have the right to get the puja performed in the Shrine. The Dharmarth Trust also made the Baridars duty bound to perform other duties such as KAH, KUNDA, ARGHI etc. as they had been performing previously.

The fact that Dharmarth could withhold the share of any Baridar if he did not pay the rent due from him pre-supposed the fact that it supervised the collection of the offerings in the sanctum sanctorum. This meant that a nominee of the Dharmarth would be present at the sanctum sanctorum when the devotees were worshipping inside the holy cave so that he could see what was being offered by whom. The controls over the activities of the Baridars were further increased subsequently under the Regulations of Devi Trikuta Ji and Regulations for Ganpat Shah which were issued as a part of Ain-e-Dharmarth in 1941 Bikrami (These have been described separately). Thus, it was for the first time in 1907 Bikrami that the State intervened in the appropriation of offerings by the Baridars so as to bring about better management and service for the pilgrims. The intervention was prompted by the mismanagement at the Shrine.

In fact, it was only from the time of Maharaja Gulab Singh that the management of the Hindu Shrines in the State could be said to have commenced along systematic lines. The Maharaja set up a Treasury called the treasury of Shri Raghunath Ji with an initial deposit of Rs. five lakhs and directed that the interest which accrued on the initial

capital should be used for permanent maintenance of Sadavarts (places for distribution of food etc. to travellers). He appointed his son Rajkumar Ranbir Singh as a Trustee of this fund which henceforth began to be called the Dharmarth Fund.

After the death of Maharaja Gulab Singh his son Rajkumar Ranbir Singh ascended the throne of Jammu and Kashmir. He went a step further than his father. In 1941 Bikrami he decided to place the management of the Sadavarts and the temples in the State on a permanent footing and for this purpose appointed a Council for the supervision, management and protection of the Dharmarth Fund. This began to be known as the Dharmarth Council. He also laid down regulations for the guidance of the Council. These regulations are contained in the compendium called Ain-i-Dharmarth. He also enjoined upon his sons, heirs, descendants and the officials and administrators of the State to lend their help to this arrangement and forbade them from incurring any expenditure not permitted by the regulations. In fact, he invoked a curse on whoever violated the regulations. He said, "Whoever among the heirs of SARKAR and State servants and officials shall expend any money towards any head other than those sanctioned by me shall incur the sin of having killed one crore of cows". The Regulations issued by Maharaja Ranbir Singh laid down in great detail the arrangements regarding maintenance of temples, Sadavarts etc. in different parts of J&K and a few such temples set up outside J&K. A chapter in the Regulations also dealt with the Shrine of Vaishno Devi Ji under the heading "Regulations regarding Shri Devi Trikuta Ji". Maharaja Ranbir Singh also deputed one Mr.Ganpat Shah to the Holy Shrine of Vaishno Devi Ji in the same year for its proper management and in order to enable him to do his work without any confusion issued "Regulations for guidance of Ganpat Shah Brahman deputed to the Shrine of Shri Devi Trikuta Ji on 2nd Assuj 1941."

The Regulations regarding Devi Trikuta Ji contained twenty seven articles. They prescribed various things starting from how the Puja should be performed [Puja of the Goddess should be performed according to the "Padati" (procedure laid down) of Shri Devi Ji, said the article] to how much should be spent on the worship relating to virgins, the symbols and weapons of the Goddess that should be got prepared and displayed, the kinds of dressess that should be prepared for the Goddess, the way endowments made at the Atka (the collection counter set up by the Dharmarth as opposed to the offerings made in the sanctum sanctorum which were appropriated by the Baridars) should be spent and their accounts maintained, the way Government buildings should be maintained, the way cow-sheds and Sadavrats should be managed, the way the landed properties of the Goddess should be managed and so on. Article 20 of the Regulations forbade the eating of meat, drinking of wine and such things at the Holy Shrine.

The regulations for the guidance of Ganpat Shah, Brahman, spelt out how he should manage the Shrine for the convenience of the pilgrims. The importance of these Regulations lies in the fact that the procedure for worshipping the Goddess and managing the Shrine for the convenience of the pilgrims were codified and laid down for the first time. The essential structure of these Regulations did not undergo any fundamental change for almost one hundred years and they continued to govern the way the Holy Shrine was managed thereafter.

The successors of Maharaja Ranbir Singh continued to take great interest in the affairs of Dharmarth which subsequently was made a Department of the Government. The Maharaja's Government also settled the issue of the ownership of the land on the Trikuta mountain and made appropriate entries in the Revenue Records. In the Revenue records prepared in 1965-66 Bikrami, *Dhar Vaishno Devi* (hill of Vaishno Devi) was shown as a separate uninhabited estate. The owner of the land was shown as "Sri Sarkar" (The Government) and the tenant occupying it was shown as "Mahakma Dharmarth" (Department of Dharmarth). The entire land was recorded as unculturable and not assessed to land revenue. The Revenue record of 1965-66 Bikrami also contained a background note indicating the conditions as they prevailed before 1907 Bikrami and the obligations imposed on the Baridars by Maharaja Gulab Singh in 1907 Bikrami, to rectify matters. These have already been discussed earlier.

The Record of Rights of the period also states that the Pujari (priest) used to be paid an amount of Rs.78 per annum from the Dharmarth Department in lieu of his services. Attempts were made by the Baridars to get the entries in the Revenue Records changed into their name instead of the name of the Sarkar and Dharmarth Department in the years 1978, 1988 and 1991 Bikrami. These were, however, rejected by the concerned officers. The Jamabandi (The Revenue Record prepared every four years after the completion of the settlement) of 1986-87 Bikrami further clarified the issue by saying that no one from either the Thakkar community or the Brahman community had any right over survey No. 166 (the land on which the holy cave and the holy pindies are situated. This area measures only 7 marlas or roughly 1900 sq.ft.) It reiterated the position of the Government and the Dharamarth Department as owner and tenant respectively. A significant change took place in the Revenue Records in 1993 Bikrami. Under the orders of the then Chief Minister, the ownership of the entire land measuring 1,48,446 Kanals and 2 Marlas (roughly 7420 hectares) including the land falling under survey No. 166, was transferred from the name of Shri Sarkar to the name of Mata Vaishno Devi Ji. This order was and has never been challenged by anyone and that is how Mata Vaishno Devi Ji became the absolute owner of land measuring 1,48,446 Kanals and 2 Marlas, and has continued to remain so till date. Interestingly enough, the Dharmarth Department also made an effort to get the entire estate of Mata Vaishno Devi Ji transferred into its name through an entry in the Revenue Records. But the then Tehsildar rejected their claim and foiled the intrigue. In 2002-2003 Bikrami, Mata Vaishno Devi Ji was recorded as a Big Landlord and thus became a victim of the Big Landed Estates Abolition Act passed in 2007 Bikrami. As a result, only an area of 4114 Kanals and 17 Marlas including land under survey number 166, was allowed to be retained in Her name and the rest of the land escheated to the State. However, this order was subsequently challenged before the Financial Commissioner of J&K and by his order dated 28.8.1970 A.D. the order of the Tehsildar was set aside and the escheated land was again restored to Mata Vaishno Devi Ji. Since then the position has been that 1,48,446 Kanals and 2 Marlas, of land on Trikuta mountain continues to remain in ownership right of the Goddess even today. Thus the Revenue Records establishes beyond doubt that the owner of the land on Dhar Vaishno Devi Ji was indeed Mata Vaishno Devi Ji and the position continues to remain the same even today. The only difference is that in the column of tenant the Dharmarth Trust has since 1986 AD been replaced by Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine Board.

REGULATIONS REGARDING SHRI DEVI TRIKUTA JI

(AS CONTAINED IN AIN-I-DHARMARTH)

Article 1 — The Puja of Shri Devi Ji (the Goddess) should be performed according to the padati (procedure laid down) of Shri Devi Ji. :

Dhup (burning of fragrance)

Deep (lighting of lamp)

Naived (offering of food etc.)

Panchamrit (offering of five nectars milk, curd, ghee, honey and Ganges water).

Article 2— The naived is of three kinds:-

First kind consisting of puris (fried cakes of flour) and other things fried — two and a half seers.

Flour one and one by four seers

Rice one and one by four seers

Pulses one by four seer

Ghee one Pali (a measure)

Sugar one by four seer

Oil one by four seer

(First offering)

Second kind of Naived consisting of raisins, grams etc. at the time of aarti.

The third kind of Naived consists of "Halwa" i.e. "Karah parshad". From shareholders Rs.10/- (British Indian currency) should be realized and Rs. 20/- should be given on behalf of His Highness and "Karahprashad" worth Rupee one of the quantity given below should be prepared daily and distributed among virgins and other indigent people . If the shareholders do not give their share, they should not be given any "Karah". It should be distributed only among the virgins and the indigent people.

Sugar	1 seer
Ghee	1 seer
Flour	1 seer

(Third offering)

Article 3 — From the allotment for the pujan (worship) relating to the virgins, out of every rupee annas four should be spent in winter, and annas eight in the summer for the purpose . The balance should be spent on the days of fairs on the worship of virgins.

Article 4 — Ornaments of every description of Shri Bhagwati Ji should be prepared.

Article 5 — Glass cover should be prepared for decoration of the Pindies (unhewn images) of Shri Bhagvati Ji.

On the days of fairs they should be placed over the Pindies for decoration. The glass cover should be provided with top lids.

Article 6 — The following symbols should be got prepared for Shri Bhagwati Ji:

Asas (silver sticks) 2. Chauri 2, trident 1, quot 1, mace 1, bow and arrow 1, conchshell 1, together with all other accoutrements or weapons.

Article 7 — On the days of fairs , the shareholders of the place and other sepoys should remain standing with the said arms in their hands . The sepoys should have one red uniform each as detailed below :

Tunic Red	1
Dhoti (a piece of cloth for the waist)	1
Turban	1

And should carry one small flag of Shri Devi Ji over the turban.

Article 8 — The dresses of Shri Bhagwati Ji should be prepared of two kinds one for fairs and the other for daily use.

Article 9 — If any person makes an offering of dress or ornament at the Darbar of Shri Devi Ji and desires that the dress or the ornament should remain at the Darbar of Shri Devi Ji, his desires should be carried out and the articles guarded as State property.

Article 10 — If any one makes an endowment of money for the Atka fund (a fund reserved for specific purpose), the specific purpose for which the money is given should be taken down in writing viz. whether it is to be spent on the furtherance of a special branch of learning or in the Puja of Shri Devi Ji or in offering (Naived and Karah) for the Goddess or other things. But out of the interest of the money four annas from every rupee should be deposited in the treasury and twelve annas only should be spent under the heads mentioned above. A report should be sent every month to the endower.

Article 11 — If any one makes an endowment for the Atka land for the purpose of constructing a building for the Goddess, sanction should be obtained from His Highness for allotment of site for the building and then the building should be erected in the place allotted.

Article 12 — The repairs etc. to all the sarkari buildings pertaining to the Darbar of Shri Devi Ji, whether they be near the temple of Bhairo Ji or that of Adhkawari should be executed properly. The path leading to the Shrine of Bhagvati Ji should be repaired where necessary.

Article 13 — Paths and prayogs (recitations and penances performed on behalf of others) on behalf of His Highness should be peformed there in future in the same manner as they have heretofore been done: paths and prayogs should never be neglected. If any state servant or a native of the country or a foreigner or any other may wish to perform prayog or get a prayog performed on his behalf, he should not be allowed to do so without first reporting to His Highness. If permission for performing the prayog be granted by His Highness, the Sankalap (that is the vow) should be openly made at the time of commencement in the public. It should not be allowed to be made in mind . If any body wishes to perform prayog for the destruction of some person or for any other wicked purpose, he should not be allowed. A person who is disloyal to the State, should not be allowed to perform prayog even if he wishes to perform it for his own health. At the time of

commencement of prayog as well as of its termination a report should be submitted to His Highness stating the name of the person performing prayog , kind of prayog and its object. If a prayog has to be performed for His Highness, at the time of its termination all the prayogis (men employed to perform prayog), should serially make a written declaration and place it at the blessed feet of the Goddess . In the declaration it should be stated solemnly that they have performed so many prayogs.

Article 14— As regards the cowshed that is established there, the same regulations as have been laid down for the one at Shri Utterbehni Ji should be followed.

Article 15 — Sadavert (distribution of food or provisions), as laid down in previous regulations, should be given to indigent people.

Article 16 — The Pandit in charge of the place at the time of fairs should lay the account book of the Atka fund before the people attending the fair.

Article 17 — The following is the scale of permanent establishment:-

Officer 1, Kotwal 1

Treasurer in charge of cowshed 2,

Pandit 1

Daftri (accountant) 2,

Sepoys for watch and ward 4

Their salaries shall be paid from the treasury of the Goddess. At the time of fairs, policemen should be requisitioned for purpose of management. Excepting the sepoys all other establishment should be allotted shares.

Article 18 — A room should be built near the gate and the accoutrements of the Goddess should be stored there; and watchmen should be posted for guarding that place.

Article 19 — Arrangements for cultivating the land on "Khudkasht" system should be made, and the money of the Goddess should be invested for the purchase of landed property; but such property only should be bought as can pay one per cent every month.

Article 20 — No one should be permitted to indulge in eating meat, drinking wine and such things.

Article 21— No virgins whose age may be above twelve years should be allowed to come there.

Article 22 — A licence fee should be levied from the shopkeepers at the time of fair, for shops occupied by them commencing from Nagrota.

Article 23 — No licence fee should be levied from the shopkeepers of the place, with whom contracts have been made, whether the shop be situated at the village of Katra or at the Shrine of Goddess.

Article 24 — To look after the temples at Nagrota, Kundala and those on Pangali tank and at other places on the road is the duty of the Kotwal of that place.

Article 25— At the time of a fair an application should be submitted to His Highness and police guard requisitioned for purposes of watch and ward, and the lodgings of the travelling public should be guarded in every respect, throughout the way commencing from Nagrota, that no body may suffer any loss.

Article 26 — A Dharmshala (public halting place open to travelers without any charges) is to be erected at Katra, a temple of the goddess should also be erected there.

Article 27 — The virgins who are being worshipped at Devi Trikuta Ji should be worshipped in rainy and snowy season at Adhkawari temple.

REGULATIONS FOR THE GUIDANCE OF GANPATSHAH, BRAHMAN, DEPUTED TO THE SHRINE OF SHRI DEVI TRIKUTA JI, ISSUED ON 2ND ASSUJ 1941

Article 1 — As you are entrusted with the duties to be performed at the Shrine of the Goddess, you should act in accordance with the regulations laid down on the subject.

Article 2 — The sarai at Katra should be got constructed according to the plan, the materials required therefor being in stock.

Article 3 — During the days of fair, safety of the life and property of the people should be attended to thoroughly so that there may be no loss or disturbance.

Article 4 — Six sepoys from vanddars (share holders) of the fair as given below, should always remain present in the Shrine:

From Daroras 2

From Manotras 2

From Ghantayalas Khas 2

Article 5 — The garden attached to the Shrine should be looked after and improvements made therein every year.

Article 6 — Cows belonging to the Shrine should be fed properly. This is to be noted carefully.

Article 7 — The houses and the "dharmshale" attached to the Shrine should be properly watched . The buildings occupied by the employees for residential purposes should be got vacated during the days of the fair, and the pilgrims allowed to put up there . Care should, however, be taken that houses do not catch fire.

Article 8 — The courtyard, garden and the road upto Banganga Nala and Dhakki Bhairo Ji should be kept clean and during the days of the fair, five sweepers should be engaged for the purpose.

Article 9 — A carpet should be spread outside the door of the cave of Shri Devi Ji and a cushion placed upon it on one side, then the image (of the goddess) should after being properly dressed be seated thereon and the Darbar held for four gharis and then adjourned .

Article 10 — The puja and the offering of Karah and Naived should also be performed without fail according to the "ain".

Article 11 — Uniforms of the above mentioned Darora, Monotra and other sepoys should be prepared out of the chartal (money offering), and they should be detailed on guard.

Article 12 — No virgin above the age prescribed should be allowed to enter and remain in the shrine.

Article 13 — Land from the village Chakla and Katra should be purchased from mortgagors, if it yields a profit of Rs. 2 per cent so that there may be no loss in the bargain.

Article 14 — Accounts pertaining to "Shri Devi Ji" should be cleared up by Kaudu Shah. This is to be noted.

Article 15 — Money available in the Head "Shri Devi Ji" should be invested in trade there, so that the capital may be increased thereby. But no amount should be given to defaulters and persons of ill repute, or you (Ganpat Shah) will be responsible for it .

Article 16 — If a person asks for a loan, ornaments etc. valuing one and a half of the amount advanced, should be held in mortgage. This is to be noted.

Article 17 — Brass and iron utensils, sufficient for the preparation of meals for fifty persons should be kept in stock.

Article 18 — There are no rules or orders permitting free supply of food to the Darora and Monotra employees from the Sadavart. Sadavart is only meant for the indigent people. This is to be noted.

Article 19 — More than three persons out of "Pujaris" and the "naubatwalas" should not be allowed to sit on the platform of the Goddess. This is to be noted.

Article 20 — If an ornament or chhatar is presented as an offering to Shri Devi Sahiba Ji by somebody who may desire that the thing should always be kept on the Goddess, it should be kept in the treasury and taken out only when it is actually required for adornment of the Goddess but the person who made the present shall pay 30 per cent of the value of the chhater for the men on watch duty and the chhater will be kept permanently in the treasury.

Article 21 — Due respect and reverence should be shown to the Goddess. Note this carefully.

Article 22 — The work in connection with the following should be assigned to the employees there:

Building

Garden

Cows

Stock of fuel

Earthen vessels

Miscellaneous work

Cash in Treasury

Ornaments, dresses

Chhatter and utensils

Miscellaneous articles

For Males

For Females

Jhagra Kotwal , Darora to supervise all work ; Daftri to maintain all accounts.

Article 23 — Latrines should be got constructed at two places (as under) and nobody should be allowed to ease himself at any other place except in the latrines and sweepers should clean the latrines regularly:

For male 1

For Female 1

Article 24 — All the sanj (Vessels for Puja) and utensils that are taken by the Pujaris from the treasury in the morning should be again deposited there at night to avoid any loss.

Article 25 — For the accommodation of His Highness one house be got constructed and kept well furnished.

Article 26 — Account book of Atka fund should be kept in the Shrine so that every body may know particulars thereof.

Article 27 — One person should be employed to keep guard at Adhkawari Ji

Article 28 — Two silver maces should be made and two sepoys should remain present at the door of the cave of the goddess with maces in their hands.

Article 29 — During the day of fair one physician of the dispensary with medicine should remain at the Shrine and should attend to the sick and after the fair is over, he should go to Katra and attend to the patients.

Article 30 — Karah and Naived of the goddess should be given to all persons turn by turn. It should not always be given to two or three persons only.

Article 31 — All the buildings and houses attached to the Shrine of Shri Devi Trikuta Ji should be kept clean . The soot of the lamp on the stones in the cave of the goddess should be got cleaned after every eight days.

Article 32 — All paths and prayogs which are performed in the Shrine on behalf of the Sarkar should be supervised, and no prayog of any other person should be allowed there without an irshhad (order of His Highness)

Dated 2nd Assuj 1941

TRADITIONAL ROUTES TO MATA VAISHNO DEVI JI

1. The best known traditional route from Jammu to the Holy Shrine of Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Ji is embodied in the following excerpt of a ballad :

PAHLA DARSHAN KOL-KANDOLI
DUA DEVA MAI
TRIYA DARSHAN CHARANPADUKA
CHAUTHA ADHKAWARI
PANJMA DARSHAN BHAIRON JATTI DA
CHHEMA GUFA PYARI

Thus the six traditional halts between Jammu and the Holy Shrine were at KOL KANDOLI, DEVA MAI, CHARAN PADUKA, ADHKAWARI, BHAIRO TEMPLE and THE HOLY SHRINE OF MATA VAISHNO DEVI JI.

The pilgrimage from Jammu to the Holy Shrine of Mata Vaishno Devi Ji commenced from the place known as DHOUNTHLI (PANJITIRTHI) in the old city of Jammu. During the earlier times the pilgrimage to Vaishno Devi Ji used to attract a very small number of pilgrims and was normally confined to the limited duration of the autumn and the spring Navratras. This is not to say that the yatra was prohibited on other days. However, traditionally it had become the practice for the pilgrims to visit Vaishno Devi Ji on the days of the two Navratras and the period immediately preceeding and succeeding them. Those pilgrims who came for darshan during the autumn Navratras (Kartik : September-October) would combine the visit with a trip to village Jhiri near Jammu where the revolutionary peasant Baba Jitto committed suicide in protest against the atrocities of the landlords. Every year a 7 day long festival is held at Jhiri and the occasion attracts a very large number of people. After participating in the festival, the pilgrims would proceed to the Trikuta mountains for Darshan of the Goddess. Those pilgrims who undertook the yatra during the spring Navratras (Chaitra: March/April) would combine the visit with a trip to the temple in the Bahu Fort near Jammu where a two day long festival used to be held on the occasion of Ram Navmi. They would also pay obeisance at the famous Raghu Nath temple of Jammu and thereafter proceed for the Yatra. The festival of Ram Navmi was celebrated with a lot of pomp and fervour in Jammu during the time of the Maharajas. The images of Lord Ram, Sita and Laxman were brought out of the Raghu Nath temple and taken out in a procession around the city. The chariots carrying the images of the gods were escorted by contingents of the Maharaja's army as well as by the ceremonial bands of the State and all the important citizens of Jammu would line the route that the Chariot would take on its journey through the city. The sight of the army contingents and the bands marching smartly through the Bazaars of Jammu must indeed have been quite a spectacle for those times.

After participating in the Ram Navmi celebrations, the pilgrims would embark upon their journey to the Holy Shrine of Vaishno Devi Ji. From Dhounthli the pilgrims would descend to the River Tawi. A toll post was located on the banks of the river Tawi and mules and ponies could be hired from this place. The mules and ponies used to be decorated with bands of "Ghunghroo" or tiny bells stitched together called GHANGHRAIL in the local language (Dogri). As the ponies moved along the track on the banks of the river Tawi, the ghunghroos around their neck would tinkle with each step and a lovely sound would permeate the atmosphere. From Dhounthli to Nagrota was a distance of 8 Kms. along the banks of the river Tawi. The temple of Kol Kandoli was situated in Nagrota and the pilgrims would negotiate the distance between Dhounthli and Nagrota in about two hours. On the way they would cross GULLU-DA-BARA, BAINTUN-DA-BAGH, SITLI-DA-MANDIR AND BABO-DA-AMBEN-DA-BAGH. They would have darshan of the Goddess in the temple at Kol Kandoli and then have their lunch. From Nagrota, the pilgrims would trek another 10-12 Kms. and reach a place called PANGALI where they would spend the night at the Sarai adjoining the temple. On the way to Pangali they would pass village JAGTI- the birth place of legendary MIAN DIDDO a guerilla leader of the Jammu region. Next morning they would leave Pangali and after crossing CHHIBBA, which had some shops, reach a place called THANDA PANI which was so named because a cool stream of water passed through it. Thanda Pani was a fairly large halting station with an orchard, a spring and some shops. To the west of Thanda Pani, on a steep hillock which was known as SHUA BHATA DI DHAKKI nestled a cave which was known as MIAN DIDDO DI GUFA. From Thanda Pani, the pilgrims would trek via the villages of MARH DRABI and GUNDLA and reach BAMYAL. A Sarai had been constructed at Bamyal. From Bamyal, the pilgrims would walk to the temple of DEVA MAI. About one Kilometre to the east of this temple lay a place called BADA ALLA GHARAT. From Deva Mai, the pilgrims would trek down hill and reach the village called NOMAIN where they would halt for the night. The up-hill journey to the Holy Shrine of Vaishno Devi Ji commenced from Nomain. Next morning, the pilgrims would leave for Katra which was located at a distance of about 5 Kms. and after paying obeisance at BHUMIKA temple they would halt for the night at Katra. Next day the pilgrims would walk up to the Holy Shrine passing through BAN GANGA, CHARAN PADUKA, ADHKAWARI, HATHI MATHA, SANJI CHHAT, BHAIRO TEMPLE and reach THE HOLY SHRINE OF MATA VAISHNO DEVI JI. They would spend the night at the Holy Shrine and then return to Jammu (Dhounthli) by the same route.

An interesting tale is associated with the route falling between Kol-Kandoli and Deva Mai. It is stated that Maharaja Ranbir Singh (who ruled the State from 1857 to 1885 AD) once adopted this route on his way to the Holy Shrine of Mata Vaishno Devi Ji. On the way he asked one of the companions of his entourage whether there was anything worth seeing along the route. The companion replied that apart from the beautiful temples of Kol Kandoli and Deva Mai, there was

one more thing that certainly merited a visit. This was a water mill (Pan Chakki also known as "Gharat " in the local language) on a stream which flowed near the hill on which the temple of Deva Mai Ji had been constructed. Each grinding stone of this water mill was about 4 feet thick and the grinding stones had a diametre which was twice as large as the grinding stones of a normal mill. Besides, the wooden flume that carried water to run the mill was also astonishingly large.The water mill was operated only when an enormous quantity of wheat or maize was collected for grinding because the grinding stones of this mill would move with the speed of a machine. The water mill and the wooden flume were certainly worth seeing. Maharaja Ranbir Singh then expressed his desire to see this water-mill on his return from Mata Vaishno Devi Ji. When the owner of the water mill learnt that Majaraja Ranbir Singh would be stopping by to see his mill on his return from Mata Vaishno Devi Ji, he became apprehensive because he feared that the Maharaja's visit may result in the closing down of his mill. After performing the yatra, Maharaja Ranbir Singh was escorted to the water-mill. He was quite astonished to see the enormous quantity of water being carried by the flume and the speed at which it was being channelised into the water mill. Inside, the water mill was grinding wheat and the room in which the mill was located was full of the white dust that was being produced by the milling of the wheat. When the Maharaja saw the thickness and the girth of the grinding stones, he exclaimed "Oh, I have never seen or heard of such a huge water mill". It is said that on the exclamation of the Maharaja, the upper grinding stone cracked and the grinding of the wheat stopped. Thereafter no grinding of any kind of crop ever took place in this water mill.

2. THE SECOND ROUTE

The pilgrims who visited Vaishno Devi Ji during the winter Navratras would stop at village JHIRI near Jammu and participate in the 7 days festival which was celebrated every year in memory of the legendary peasent Baba Jitto and his daughter Bua Gauri. On the conclusion of the festival these people would embark on the journey to Mata Vaisho Devi JI from the place called BABE DA TALLA and passing through the place known as SIMBALAI-ALA PUL and the villages of GAROTA, RANJAN (NARGARAO), BADOOTI and GWALA CHAK, they would reach BAMYAL. From Bamyal onwards they followed the same route as indicated earlier viz. DEVA MAI, NOMAIN AND KATRA.

3. THE THIRD ROUTE

The people living in the vicinity of Mata Vaishno Devi Ji viz. the villages of GUNNI, AGHAR JITTO, REASI, POUNI ETC. took the route via the place called RASAINI GUFA and proceeded straight to the Holy Cave by passing the traditional stops of CHARAN PADUKA, ADHKAWARI, SANJI CHHAT AND BHAIRO GHATI.

In fact, people in the earlier times adopted the route which they felt would be most convenient to them while undertaking the journey to the Holy Shrine of Mata Vaishno Devi Ji.

AARTI

The various mantras chanted during Aarti are given hereunder. Only general explanations of the mantras have been attempted. Detailed explanations of the Mantras have not been given :

At the commencement of the Aarti the Pujaris first of all speak aloud the 108 names of the Goddess which are as under :

1. OMSATI
2. SAADHAVI
3. BHAV PREETA
4. BHAWAANI
5. BHAVMOCHANI
6. AARYAA
7. DURGAA
8. JAYAA
9. AADYAA
10. TRINETRAA
11. SHOOLDHARINI
12. PINAAK DHARINI
13. CHITRAA
14. CHANDRA GHANTAA
15. MAHAATAPA
16. MAN
17. BUDDHI
18. AHANKAARA
19. CHITTAROOPAA
20. CHITTAA
21. CHITTI
22. SARVAMANTRAMAVI
23. SATTAA
24. SATANANDA SWAROOPINI
25. ANANTA
26. BHAAVINI
27. BHAAVYA
28. BHAVYA
29. ABHAVYA
30. SADAGATI
31. SHAAMBHAVI
32. DEVMAATA
33. CHINTAA
34. RATNA PRIYAA
35. SARVVIDYAA
36. DAKSHA KANYAA
37. DAKSHA YAGYA VINAASHINI
38. APARNAA
39. ANEK VARNAA
40. PAATLAA
41. PAATLAAVATI
42. PATTAAMBAR PARIDHAANA
43. KALMANJINI
44. AMEVA VIKRAMA
45. KROORAA
46. SUNDARI
47. SARSUNDARI
48. VAN DURGA
49. MAATANGI
50. MATANGMUNI PUJITA
51. BRAAHMI
52. MAAHESHWARI
53. EIDREE
54. KAUMAARI
55. VAISHNAVI
56. CHAAMUNDAA
57. VAARAAHI
58. LAKSHMI
59. PURUSHA KRITI
60. VIMLA
61. UTKARSHINI
62. GYAANAA
63. KRIYAA
64. NITYAA
65. BUDDHIDAA
66. BAHULAA
67. BAHUL PREMA
68. SARVA VAAHAN VAAHANAA
69. NISHUMBHA SHUMBHA HANINI
70. MAHISHASUR MARDINI
71. MADHU KAITABH HANTARI
72. CHANDA MUNDA VINAASHINI
73. SARVA ASUR VINAASHAA
74. SARVA DAANAV GHAATINI
75. SARVA SHAASTRAMAVI
76. SATYA
77. ANEK SHASTRA HASTAA
78. ANEKAASTRAA DHAARINI
79. KUMARI
80. EK KANYA
81. KAISHORI
82. YUVATI
83. YATI
84. APRAUDHA
85. PRAUDAH
86. VRIDDHMAATA
87. BALPRADAA
88. MAHODARI
89. MUKTAKESHI
90. GHOR RUPAA
91. MAHAABALAA
92. AGNI JWALAA
93. RAUDRAMUKHI
94. KAAL RATRI
95. TAPASVINI
96. NAARAYANI
97. BHANDRAKAALI
98. VISHNU MAAYA
99. JALOORI
100. SHIV DOOTI
101. KARAALI
102. ANANTAA
103. PARMESHWARI
104. KAATYAAYANI
105. SAAVITRI
106. PRATYAKSHAA
107. BRAHM VAADINI
108. SARVA SHAASTRAMAYI

They then perform 'Atma Puja' for self purification. This is done by the chanting of the following mantras:

OM APAVITRAH PAVITRO VA
SARVAVASTHAM GATOAPI VA.
YAH SMRAIT PUNDARIKA AKSHAM SA VAHYA

ABHYANTARAH SHUCHIH.
Explanation: whoever contemplates upon Vishnu gets automatically purified, both mentally and physically.
This is followed by '**Achman**'(drinking of holy water after accepting it in the palm of the hand) which helps to wash off the sins committed by action, thought and speech. The mantra runs as follows:
OM KESHAVAYA NAMAH, OM NARAYANAYA NAMAH, OM MADHAVAYA NAMAH,
OM GOVINDAYA NAMAH.
Explanation : I bow to thee Keshav, I bow to thee Narayan, I bow to thee Madhav, I bow to thee Govind.
This is followed by the chanting of the following mantra to welcome Lakshmi and applying **Tilak** (or an auspicious mark) on the forehead of the Pujaris.
OM GANDHA DWARAAM DURAA DHARSHAAM NITYAPUSHTAAM
KARISHINIM,
ISHWARIM SARVA BHOOTAANAAM TAAMIHOPAHAV YAI SHRIYAM.
Explanation: Lakshmi, the omnipotent giver of prosperity, I respectfully welcome you to my home.
In the next mantra the Pujaris pray to the Goddess for granting them sound and robust health by chanting the following mantras:
OM, AIN, HRIDAYAAY NAMAH,
OM VAG MAI AASYAI ASTU,
OM NASOR MAI PRANO ASTU,
OM AKSHANOR MAI CHAKSHUR ASTU,
OM KARNAYOR MAI SHROTRAM ASTU,
OM BAHYOR MAI BALAM ASTU,
OM OORVOR MAI OJO ASTU,
OM ARISHTANI MAI ANGANI
TANU STANVA MAI SAHASANTU.
Explanation: Oh Mother, Keep my heart, speech, breathing, sight, hearing, strength and energy intact and disease free.
After this the earth is worshipped by chanting the following mantra:
OM PRITHVI ITI MANTRASYA MERUPRISHTA RISHIHI SUTALAM,
CHANDAH, KOORMO DEVTAA, AASAN SHODHANAY VINIYOGAH.
OM PRITHVI TVAYAA DHRITAA LOKAA
DEVI TVAM VISHNUNA DHRITAA,
TVAM CHA DHAARAY MAAM DEVI
PAVITRAM KURU CHA AASANAM.
Explanation: In these mantras the earth is worshipped in order to purify the place for sitting. Oh Mother earth, just as you hold the earth and Vishnu holds you. I beseech you to hold me and accept this seat that I am offering you.
Thereafter an **Argha** (water containing a mixture of milk, rice, grass etc.) is offered to Surya Devta (Sun God) with the chanting of the following Mantra:
OM EHI SURYA SAHASRAANSHO TEJO RAASHAY JAGAT PATAY,
ANUKAMPAYA MAAM BHAKTYA GRIHANAARGHYA DIVAKAR.
Explanation: Oh Sun, master of the brilliant effulgence, please accept this Argha that I am offering with complete devotion.
This is followed by Deep Pujan (worship of the flame of the lamp) and Dhoop Pujan (worship of incense) which are performed by the chanting of the following mantras:
OM SUPRAKAASH MAHAADEEP SARVATRA TAMIRAPAH,
PRASID MAM GOVIND DEEPO ARGHAYAH
PRATIGRIHYATAAM.
Explanation: Oh, the remover of darkness, please accept my Argha.
OM VANASPATI RASOD BHOOT
GANDHAADYA GANDHUTTAMAH,
AARGHEYA SARVADEVAANAAM
DHOOPOAYAM PRATIGRIHYA TAAM.
Explanation: Please accept this essence of flora which has such divine smell.
This is followed by the **"Pratigya Sankalp"** (to resolve to fulfil a vow) which runs as follows
OM VISHNUR VISHNUR VISHNU,
OM TATSADYA BRAHMANOAHINI,
DWITIYA PRARDHE,
VISHNU PADE,
SHRI SHWET VARAAH KALPE,
VAIVASVAT MANVANTAREY
ASHTAAVINSHATI,
TAMEY YUGEY KALIYUGEY,
KALI PRATHAM CHARNEY,
BHURLOKEY JAMBUDWEEPEY
BHARATVARSHEY BHARATKHANDEY
AARYAR VARTAK DESHEY,
VIKRAM SHAKEY BAUDHAAVTAAREY,
AMUK NAAM SAMVATSAREY,
SHRI SURYEY AMUKAAYNEY,
AMUK MAASEY, AMUK PAKSHEY,
AMUK TITHAU, AMUK VAASREY,
AMUK GOTROTPANNAH,
AMUK SHARMA AHAM, SHRUTI,
SMRITI PURAANOKTA PHAL PRAAPTEY,
SHRI MAATAA VAISHNAVI DEVI
SIDDHAPEETHEY VISHVAKALYAN KETAVEY, SHRI MAATAA MAHAA KAALI
MAHAA LAKSHMI MAHAA SARASWATI
SHRI MAATAA VAISH NAVI DEVI,
PRATAH (SAAYAN) KAALEEN
SHODASHOPCHAAREN
POOJA AHAM KARISHYEY.
TATRAADAU NIRVIGHANTAA SIDHYARTHAM GANAPATI PUJA NAM CHA KARISHYEY.
Explanation :- In this mantra the Pujari takes a vow that he shall worship Mata Mahakali, Maha Laxmi and Maha Sarswati who are manifested in petrified rock form in the holy Shrine of Mata Vaishno Devi Ji for the welfare of the world. He also vows that he shall worship Ganapati (Ganesh) also.
Once the "Pratigya Sankalp " is over, the Shringaar of the Goddess is removed and the ablutions are performed. While the Goddess is being bathed, mantras for `Kalyan' (well being) are chanted. These are known as **SVASTI VAACHAN** and are as follows:
HARI OM SVASTI NA INDRO VRIDDHA SHRAVAAH,
SVASTI NA POOSHAAH VISHVA VEDAAH,
SVASTI NA ANTARIKSHYO ARISHTA NEMI,
SVASTI NO BRIHASPATIR DADHAATU,
PAYAH PRITHVIYAAM, PAYAH AUSHADHISHU,
PAYO DIVYA ANTARIKSHAY,
PAYODHAAH PAYA SVATIH PRADISHAH SANTU MAHAYAM.
VISHNOR RAATAM ASI,
VISHNOH SHNAPATRESTHO,
VISHNO SYOO RA SI,
VISHNO DHRUVO ASI VAISHNAVAM ASI VISHNA VETVAA.
AGNIRDEVATAA VAATO DEVTAA
SURYO DEVATAA CHANDRAMAA DEVATAA
VASVO DEVATAA RUDRA DEVATAA,
AADITYA DEVATAA MAARUTO DEVATAA VISHVEDEVAH DEVTAA.
BRIHASPATIR DEVATENDRO DEVATAA,
VARUNO DEVATAA.
OM DHYAU SHAANTIR ANTARIKSHE SHAANTIH PRITHVI SHAANTI RAAPAH SHAANTIR AUSHADHAYAH,
SHAANTI VANASPATYAH.
SHAANTI VISHVE DEVAH SHAANTI REVA SHAANTIH

SAAMA
SHAANTIREDHI SUSHANTIR BHAWATI.

OM VISHVAANI DEVA SAVITURDURITANI PARAASUV YAD BHADRAM TANNA AASUVA,

IMAA RUDRAAYE TAVASE KAPADDIR
NEKSHAYA DWIRAAYE PRAVARAAMAHE MATIH YATHAA SHAMSADWI PADEY
CHATUSHPADEY VISHVAM PUSHTAM GRAAMEY ASMINNAATURAM,
ETANTEY DEVA SAVITUR YAGYAM PRAHURBRIHASPATYE BRAHMANEY TEYN YAGYAMAV TEYN YAGYA PATIM TEYN MAAMAV
MANO JYOTIR JUSHATAM AJASYA BRIHAS PATI YAGYAM IMAM
TANO TVARISHTAM YAGYA SAMIM
MAND DHAATU VISHVEDEVAAH
SA IHMADYANTAAMO PRATISHTHA AISHAVEY PRATISHTHAA NAAM YAGYO YATRE TEYN YAGYEN YAJANTEY SARVAM EVA PRATISHTHITAM BHAWATI
OM DEVASYATVAA SAVITUH PRASAVE ASHWINO BAAHUBHYAAM
POOSHANO HASTAABHYAAM.

Explanation : All the mantras of Swasti vachan pray for the well being of the world and exhort that peace should prevail upon the earth and the Universe. Oh God, let your eight elements viz.the heavens, space, earth, water, medicines, flora, Vishvay Deva and Brahma spread peace in the Universe and ensure the well being of all.
After this the Goddess is bathed respectively with milk, curds (yogurt), ghee (clarified butter) honey and suger. As the bath with each of these is completed, the Goddess is, also bathed with water before commencing the bath with the next item. While these baths are going on the following mantras are chanted.

MANTRA FOR BATHING IN MILK
OM PAYAH PRITHVIYAAM PAYA AUSHADHISHU
PAYO DIVYA ANTRIKSHE PAYODHAAH,
PAYASVATIH PRADISHAH SANTUMAHYAM.

Explanation : That which has been produced by the cow Kamdhenu, that which is the basis for all life, that which is also pure enough for being used in a "Yagya," such is the milk I am using to bathe you.

MANTRA FOR BATHING IN WATER
OM DEVASYATVAA SAVITUH PRASAVE ASHVINO
BAAHU BHYAAM POOSHANO
HASTAABHAYAAM

MANTRA FOR BATHING IN CURDS
OM DADHIKRAAVAN O AKAARISHAM JISHNO RASHVA SYA
VAAJINAH SURABHI NO MUKHA KARAT PRANAAYU SHITAARISHAT.

Explanation : That which has been produced from milk, is sweet to eat and has the complexion of the moon, I have brought such curds for your bath.

MANTRA FOR BATHING IN WATER
OM DEVASYA TVAA SAVITUH PRASAVE
ASHVI NO
BAAHU BHYAAM POOSHANO
HASTAABHYAAM

MANTRA FOR BATHING IN GHEE (CLARIFIED BUTTER)
OM GHRITAM MIMIKSHEY GHRITAM ASYA
YONIGHRITEY SHRITO GHRITAM VASYA DHAAMAM,
ANSUSHVA DHAMAA VAHA MAADYASV SVAHAA KRITAM
VRISHABH VAKSHI HAVYAM.
OM NAVNEET SAMUTPANNAM SARV SANTOSH KAARAKAM,
GHRITAM TUBHYAM PRADAASYAMI
SNAANAARTHAM PRATI GRIHYATAAM.

Explanation : That which has been born from butter and gives strength to people, I have brought such ghee for your bath.

MANTRA FOR BATHING IN WATER
OM DEVASYATVAA SAVITUH PRASAVE
ASHVI NO
BAAHUBHYAAM POOSHANO
HASTAABHYAAM

MANTRA FOR BATHING IN HONEY
OM MADHU VAATA RITAAYATE MADHU
KSHARANTI SINDHVAH,
MAADHAVEERN SANTVAUSHADHIH
MADHUNAKTA MUTOSHASO
MADHUMATPAARTHIVA RAJAH,
MADHU DYORASTU NAH PITAA.
MADHMAANNO VANSPATIM ARDHUMAN ASTU SURYAH
MAADHAVIR GAAVO BHAVANTU NAH.
(OM TARU PUSHPA SAMVUDBHOOTAM SUSVAADU MADHURAM MADHU
TEJAH PUSHTI KARAM DIVYAM SNAANAARTHAM PRATIGRIH YATAAM)

Explanation : That which has been produced by innumerable divine flowers, that which contains all good qualities and is sweet to taste, kindly accept this honey for your bath.

MANTRA FOR BATHING IN WATER
OM DEVASYATVAA SAVITUH PRASAVE ASHVINO
BAAHU BHYAAM POOSHANO HASTAABHYAAM.

MANTRA FOR BATHING IN SUGAR
OM APAA RASAM UDDWAYAS SURYE SANT SAMAAHITAM,
APAA RASASYA YO RASASTAM VO GRIHAAMUT
TAMAM UPAAYAM GRAHITO SINDRAYATVAA JUSHTATAM GRIHAAMAYESHETEY YONIR INDRAA YATVAA JUSHTA TAMAM.
(OM IKSHUSAAR SAMUD BHOOTA SHARKARA PUSHTI KARIKAA,
MALAAPAHAARIKA DIVYAA
SNAANAARTHAM PRATIGRIHYATAAM).

Explanation : That which has been produced from sugarcane, that which is full of elements which give strength and that which reduces the dirt produced by the body, such sugar I offer to you for your bath.

MANTRA FOR BATHING IN WATER
OM DEVASYA TVAA SAVITUM PRASAVE ASHVINO
BAAHU BHYAAM POOSHANO HASTAABHYAAM

Once the bath with the individual items is over, all the five items known as "Amrit" are combined and the Goddess is bathed with this mixture. This is known as giving a bath with five or Panch Amritas and the following mantras is chanted while this is being performed.

PANCHAAMRIT SNAN MANTRA
OM PANCH NADYAH SARASWATIM PIYANTI SASTROTSAH,
SARASWATI TU PANCHDHAA SO DESHEY BHA VATSARIT.
OM PAYO DADHI GHRITAM CHA EV MADHU CHA SHAR KARAAYUTAM,
PANCHAAMRITAM MAYAADEVI
SNAANAARTHAM PRATI GRIHYA TAAM.

After the bath with five "Amritas" is over, the Goddess is again bathed with water and the following mantra is chanted while this is being performed. In this mantra the names of all the major rivers in the country are spoken out aloud with the intention of depicting that the entire subcontinent is one country.

MANTRA FOR BATHING IN WATER
OM GANGEY CHA YAMUNEY CHA EV GODAAVARI SARASWATI,
NARMADEY SINDHUH KAAVERI JALEY

ASMIN SANNIDHIM KURU.
OM GANGA SINDHU SARASWATI CHA YAMUNA GODAVARI NARMADAA,
KAAVERI SARYU MAHENDRA TANYA CHARMANVATI VEDIKA.
KSHIPRAA VETRAVATI MAHASUR NADI KHYATAA CHA YAA GANDAKI,
PURNAA PURNA JALEY SAMUDRA
SANHITAA KURVANTU BHO MANGALAM.
OM MANGALAM BHAGWAN VISHNU MANGALAM GARUD DHWAJA,
MANGALAM PUNDARIKAAKSHA
MANGALAM TANO HARIH.

After the ablutions are over, Lord Ganpati is worshipped by the chanting of the following mantras. Lord Ganpati is always invoked when any auspicious act is to be performed :

MANTRA FOR WORSHIP OF GANPATI

OM GANAA NAAMTVAA GANAPATI HAWAAMAHEY PRIYAA NAAM
TVAA PRIYAPATI HAVAMAHEY NIDHINAAM TVA NIDHI PATI
HAWAMAHEY VASO MAM,
AHAM JAANIGBBHARDHAMAA TVAM
JAASI GABBHARDHAM.
NAMO GANEY BHYO GANPATI
BHAYASCH VO NAMO NAMO, BRAATEY BHYO BRAAT PATIB HYASCHA VO
NAMO NAMO,
GRIHATSEYBHYO GRIHATS
PATIBHYASCH VO NAMO NAMO,
VIRUPEY BHYO VISHVARUPEY BHAYASCH
VO NAMO NAMAH.
OM GANAPATEY NAMAH.
OM SUMUKHAH CHA EK DANTASCH KAPILO GAJ KARNA KAH,
LAMBODARASCH VIKATO VIGHNA NAASHO VINAAYA KAH.
DHUMRA KETU GANAAR DHYAKSHO BHAAL CHANDRO GAJAANA NAH.
DWADASH ETAANI NAAMAANI YAH PATHAIT SHRANU YAAD API.
VIDYARAMBHEY VIVAAHEY CHA PRAVESHEY NIRGAMEY TATHAA,
SANKATEY CHA EV
VIGHNAH TASYA NA JAAYATEY.
VAKRATUND MAHAA KAAI KOTI SURYA SAMPRAB HA,
NIRVIGHNAM KURU MEY DEV SARVA KAARYESHU SARVADAA.
OM BRAHMAA MURAARI STRIPURAANTA KAARI
BHAANUH SHASHI BHOOMI SUTO
VADHUSCH CHA,
GURUSCH CHA SHUKRA SHANI RAHU KETAVAH SARVEY GRAHAAH SHAANTI KARAA BHAVAN TU.

Explanation : Oh Ganpati, we pray to you for overcoming all obstructions and for the welfare of our women, children and loved ones. We were born out of the wombs of our mothers whereas you emerged independently. Oh Lord with the bent trunk, enormous body and the effulgence of a million sons,please remove all the difficulties that lie in the performance of my tasks.

MANTRAS FOR BESEECHING FORGIVENESS FOR SINS AND FAULTS

NA MANTRAM NO YANTRAM TADAPI
CHA JAANEY STUTIMAHO
NA CHAAHVAANAM DHYANAM TADAPI CHA
NA JAANEY STUTI KATHAAH.
NA JAANEY MUDRAA ASTE TADAPI CHA
NA JAANEY VILAPANAM
PARAM JAANEY MAATAH TVAD
ANUSARANAM KLESH
HARNAM.
VIDHEYR GYANEYN DRAVINAM VIRHEYNAA ALASTYAA
VIDHEYAA SHAKYA TVAAT TAV CHARAN YORYAA
CHYUTIRBHUT.
TADEY TAT KSHANTA VYAM JANANI SAKLO DWAARINI SHIVEY
KUPUTRO JAAYATEY KVACHIDAPI KUMAATAA NA BHAWATI.
PRITHIVYAAM PUTRAASTEY JANANI BAHWA SANTI SARLAAH
PARAM TESHAAM MADHYEY VIRAL
TARALO AHAM TAV SUTAH.
MADIYO AYAM TYAAGAH SAMUCHITAM IDAM NO TAV SHIVEY
KUPUTRO JAAYATEY KVACHIDAPI
KUMAATA NA BHAWATI.
JAGAN MAATAR MAATAH
TAV CHARAN SEWAA NA RACHITAA
NA VAA DATAM DEVI DRAVINAM API
BHUYASTAV MAYAA.
TATHAAPI TVAM SNEHAM MAYI NIRUPAMAM YAT PRAKURUSHEY
KUPUTRO JAAYATEY KVACHIDAPI KUMAATA NA BHAWATI.
PARITYAKTAA DEVAA VIVIDH VIDH SEWAA KUL TAYAA
MAYAA PANCHAASHITEYDHIKAM PANITEY TU VAYASI,
IDAANIM CHEYN MAATAH TAV YADI KRIPA NA API BHAVITAA
NIRAM LAMBO LAMBODAR JANANI KAM YAAMI SHARNAM.
SHVAPAAKO JALPAAKO BHAWATI MADHUPAAKO APAMGIRAA.
NIRAANTANKO RANKO VIHARTI CHIRAM KOTI KANKEYH,
TVAA PARNEY KARNEY VISHATI MANUVARNEY PHALAM IDAM
JANAH KO JAANITEY JANANI JAPNIYAM JAPVIDYO.
CHITAA BHASMAA LEPO GARALAM SHANAM DIKPATDHARO
JATA DHARI KANTHE BHUJAGPATI HAARI PASHUPA TIH,
KAPAALI BHOOTESHO BHAJATI JAGDISH EKAA PADVIM
BHAWAANI TVATPAANI GRAHAN PARIPAATI PHALAM IDAM.
NA MOKSHASYA AKAANSHAA BHAV VIBHAV VAANCHHA API CHA NA MEY
NA VIGYAAN APEKSHAA SHASHI MUKHI
SUKHECHHA API NA PUNAH,
ATAH TVAAM SANYAACHEY JANANI JANANAM YAATU MAM VEIY
MRIDANI RUDRAANI SHIV SHIV BHAWAANI
ITI JAPATAH.
NAA AARAADHITAA ASI VIDHINAA VIVIDHOPCHAAREYH
KI RUKSHA CHINTAN PAREIRNA KRITAM VACHOBHIH,
SHYAMEY TVAMEYV YADI KINCHAN MAYYA NAATHEY
DHATSEY KRIPAAM UCHITAMAMBA PARAM TAVEYV.
AAPATSU MAGNAH SMARNAM TVADIYAM
KAROMI DURGEY KARUNAAARNAVESHI.
NAI TACHHATH TVAM MAM
BHAAVYEYTHAH
KSHUDHA TRISHARTAA JANANI SMARANTI
JAGDAMB VICHITRA MANTRAM KIM PARIPURNAA
KARUNA ASTI CHENMAYI.
APRAADH PARAMPARA PARAM NAHI MAATAA

SAMUPEKSHATEY SUTAM.
MATSAMAH PAATAKI NAASTI PAAPAGHNI TVATSAMAA NA HE.
EVAM GYAATVA MAHAA DEVI YATHAA YOGYAM TATHAA KURI.

Explanation : Oh Mother, I am ignorant of either the ways in which you should be worshipped or the mantras which should be chanted in your praise. I do not even know how to meditate upon you. I am illiterate, lazy and poor. It is due to these defects that I often commit errors while trying to worship you. However, I know one thing for certain that if I persist in my endeavour to please you, I will be rewarded and you will remove all the sorrows that afflict me today. Oh, Mother, I am your child and it does not behove you to discard me. For it is well known that even if a son may become an ungrateful wretch his mother never forsakes him.

Oh Mother, it is well known that if even a single word of the mantras chanted in your praise falls into the ears of the most wretched person he benefits beyond measure both spiritually and materially. And worshipping you regularly brings incalculable merit to your devotees. Oh Mother, it is well known that even Shanker attained his enviable status of Bhagwan only after you lent your helping hand by marrying him. Therefore, I would also like to spend my life in worshipping you rather than in seeking material pleasures. Oh Mother, even when a son commits one sin after another, his mother never rejects him. Instead, she accepts him and continues to love him. Oh Mother, there is no greater sinner than me and there is none who can forgive sins like you. So, I am throwing myself at your mercy. Please do whatever you think is appropriate.

The following mantra is chanted while the Goddess is dressed after the ablutions.

MANTRA FOR DONNING OF GARMENTS

OM YUVAAH SUVAASAH PARIVEET AAGAAT SA
USHREYAAN BHAWATI JAAYE MAANAH,
TANDHI RAASAH KAVAYA UNNYANTI SWADHYO
MANSAH DEVYANTAH .
VASTRAM SAMARPAYAAMI.

PURUSH SUKTAM

HARIH OM SAHASTRA SHEERSHAA PURUSHAH
SAHASTRA AAKASHAH SAHASTRA PAAT,
SA BHOOMI SAVATSPRITVAA TYATISHTHATH DASH
AANGALAM.

Explanation : The Primordial Purush (Man) has innumerable heads, eyes and feet. He has enveloped the earth from all sides and even after that he has size to spare.

PURUSH EYVED SARVAVAM YADBHOOTAM YACCH
BHAAVYAM,
UTAAMRIT TVASYE SHAANO YADANNEY NAATI
ROHATI.

Explanation : Whatever has occurred in the past and whatever will happen in the future is Purush only. He is the master of immortality and prosperity.

ETAA VAANSYA MAHIMAATO JYAAYAAN SHACH
PURUSHAH,
PAADO ASYA VISHWAA BHOOTAANI TRIPAADASYA
AMRITAM DIVI.

Explanation : This Purush is incredibly great. The entire Universe is adjusted in only one quarter of his being and the remaining three quarters are occupied by space.

TRIPAAD UDDDHRAV UDAYAT PURUSHAH
PAADO SYEHA BHAVAT PUNAH,
TATO VISHWAN VYAK KRAAMATSA ASHNAA NASH NEY
ABHI.

Explanation : Purush left three fourth of his being for space and with the remaining one fourth of his being he fashioned living and non living things and spread them all around.

TATO VIRAD JAAYAT VIRAAJO ADHI PURUSHAH,
SAJAATO ATYARICHYAT PASHCHAAD BHOOMI
MATHO PURAH.

Explanation : Thereafter, a Universal Being known as Virad which contained innumerable things sprung out of the Primordial Purush. Virad thereafter produced another Purush which also had life. As soon as it came into existence this Purush fashioned himself into Gods, men etc. He then produced the earth and thereafter constructed a body.

TASNNAADYA GYAAT SARVA HUTAH SAMBHRITAM
PRISHDAA JYAM,
PASHUNSTAANSH CHAKKREY VAAYVYAA
NAARANYA GRAMYASHCCHAYE.

Explanation : This Purush then collected ghee mixed with curds (clarified butter mixed with yogurt) and created the creatures which lived in the forests and in the sky.

TASMAAD YAGYAAT SARVA HUTRICHAH
SAAMAANI JAGYIREY,
CHHANDAA ASI JAGYIREYT A SMAADYA JUST SMAAD
JAAYAT.

Explanation : Rig and Sama Veda were produced by this Purush. It was also he who created the Atharva Ved and Yajur Ved.

TASMAADSHVA AJAAYANT YEY KEY CHOBHYADATAH,
GAAVO HA JAGYIREY TASMAATTSMAAJA JAATAA
AJAAVYAH.

Explanation : This Purush created horses, assess, creatures with teeth on the upper and lower jaws, cows, and goats and sheep.

TAM YAGYAM BAHARISHI PRAUKSHANN PURUSHAM
JAATAM GRATAH,
TEYN DEVAA AJAAYANT SAADHYA RISHYASH CHA YEY.

Explanation : The Devas then worshipped this Purush who was created before the creation of the Universe. Thereafter the Devas, the Prajapatis and the sages completed the Yagya.

YATPURUSHAM VYAD DHUH KATI DHAA
VYAKALPAYAN,
MUKHAM KIMSYASEETKIM BAAHU KIMRU PAADAA
UCHYETEY.

Explanation : When the Virad Purush was motivated to appear in person by the prayers of the Devas, into how many parts was he divided? What were his face, arms, legs and feet called?

BRAHMANO ASYA MUKHAM AASEED BAAHU
RAAJANYAH KRITAH,
URU TADASYA YADAD VAISHYAH PADBHYAM SHUDRO
AJAAYAT.

Explanation : The Brahmans were born out of the face of this Purush, the kshatriyas were born out of his arms, from the thighs and legs were born the Vaishyas and the Shudras sprung from his feet.

CHHANDRAMAA MANSO JAATASH CHAKSHOH SURYO
AJAAYAT,
SHROTRAD VAYUSHCHA PRAANASH CHA MUKHAAD
AGNIR JAAYAT.

Explanation : The moon was born out of his mind, the sun was born out of his ears and fire was born out of his mouth.

NABYAA AASEEDANTARIKSHA SHIRSHNO DYOH
SAMVARTAT,
PADBHYAAM BHUMIRDDISHAH SHROTRAA TATHA
LOKAN ANKALPAYAN.

Explanation : From his navel was created space, from his head was created heaven, from his feet was created the earth and from his ears the four directions and the various worlds.

YATPURUSHEYN HAVISHA DEVA YAGYAM
TANVAT,
VASANTO ASYASI DAAJYAM GREESHMA IDHMAH
SHARAD DHVIH.

Explanation : After the Devas were blessed with divine bodies they performed a Yagya with the materials that were fashioned out of the being of Purush. At that time spring season acted as the ghee for the yagya, summer season acted as the fuel for the yagya and winter season acted as the mixture that is put as "Homa" in the Yagya.

SAPTAASYAASAN PARIDHYISTRAH SAPT SAMIDHAH KRITAAH.
DEVAA YADYA GYANTANAVAANAA ABAGHNAN PURUSHAM PASHUM.
Explanation : When the Devas were performing this yagya with their minds in which they had transformed Purush into animal form, the yagya had seven "Paridhis" and twenty one "Samidhas". The seven Paridhis included Mantras like the Gayatri and the twenty one Samidhas included the twelve months, five seasons, three worlds and the sun.
YAGYEYN YAGYAM YAJANT DEVAASTAANI
DHARMAANI PRATHMAA NYAASAN.
TEH NAAKAM MAHIMAANAH SACHANT YATRA
POORVEY SAAD DHYAAAH SANTI DEVAAH.
Explanation : The Devas worshipped the Purush with the Yagya. It was this Purush who was the first Dharma. The worshippers (Devas), therefore, attained "Swarg" or heaven. It is in this heaven that Brahma who is an expert in fashioning the Universe lives along with the other Devas.
When the chanting of the "Purush Suktam" is over the following mantras are chanted while sandal wood paste, rice grains and flowers are offered to the Goddess.

MANTRAS FOR PUTTING SANDAL WOOD PASTE
OM GANDHA DWAARAAM DURAADHARSHA
NITYA PUSHTAAM KAREESHINEEM.
EESHWAREEM SARVA BHOOTAANAAM TAAMIHYOP HAVYEY SHRIYAM.
OM TVAAM GANDHARVAA AKHANAH TVAAM INDRAH , TVAAM BRIHASPATIH,
TVAAM AUSHADHEY SOMO RAAJAA VIDVAAN YAKSHAM AADAMUCHAYAT.
OM SHRI KHANDAM CHANDANAM DIVYAM GANDHAADYAM SUMANOHARAM,
VILEYPANAM SURSHESHTHA CHANDANAM PRATI GRIHYAATAAM.
Explanation : I beseech the all powerful and master of all the riches, Goddess Laxmi, to come here and kindly accept this divinely smelling sandal wood paste.

MANTRAS FOR PUTTING RICE GRAINS
OM AKSHANNAM EEMDANT HYAAV PRIYAA ADHOOSHAT,
ASTAUSHAT SWABHANAVO BIPRA NA VISHTTHAYA MATI YOJAANVINDRA TEY HAREE.
AKSHATAAN SAMARPYAAMI.
Explanation : Oh Goddess, I offer to you rice grains which have been coloured with saffron and are fit for the gods. Please accept them.

MANTRAS FOR PUTTING FLOWERS
OM YA PHALINEERYA APHALA APUSHPAA YAASH CHA PUSHPNEE,
BRIHASPATI PRASUTAASTAA NO MUNCHANTVAN HASAH.
OM AUSHDHEEH PRATIMO DHWAM PUSHPVATIH PRASU VARIH,
ASHVA IV SAJITVAREER VEERUDHAH PAAR YISHNA VAH.
Explanation : I have brought these fragrant flowers for your worship. Kindly accept them.

SHRI SUKTAM
OM HIRANYA VARNAAM HARINEEM SUVARNA RAJAT SRAJAM,
CHANDRAAM HIRANYAMAYEEM
LAKSHMEEM JAAT VEDO MA AAVAH.
TAAM MA AAVAH JAAT VEDO LAKSHAMEE
MANAP GAAMINEEM,
YASYAAM HIRANYAM VINDEYAM GAAM SHVAM PURUSHAANAHAM.
ASHVA PURVAAM RATHMADHYAAM HASTINAAD · PRA BODHINEEM,
SHRIYAM DEVI MUPHAVYEY SHRIR MAA DEVI JUSHAA TAM.
KAAM SO SMITAAM HIRANYA PRAAKAARAA MAAR DRAAM JWALANTEEM TRIPAAM TAARPAYANTEEM.
PADMEY STHITAAM PADMA VARNAA TAAMI HOP HAVYEY SHRIYAM.
CHANDRAAM PRABHAASAM YASHASAA JWALANTIM SHRIYA LOKEY DEV JUSHTAAM UDAARAAM.
TAAM PADMANEY IMAM SHARANAM AHAM PRAPADD YEY ALAKSHMIRMEY NASHYA TAAM TVAAM VRINEY.
ADITYA VARNEY TAPSO ADHIJAATO
VANASPATISTAVA VRIKSHO ATHBILVAH.
TASYA PHALAANI TAPASA NUDANTU MAAYANTRAA YAASHCHA BAAHYAA
ALAKSHMIH.
UPETU MAAM DEVSAKHAH KIRTISH CHA MANINAASAH.
PRADURBHOOTO SURAASHTREY ASMIN KEERTIM VRIDDHIM DADAATUMEY.
KSHUTIPA PAASAAMLAAM JAYESHTHAAM LAKSHMMEM NAA SHYAA MAHYAM.
ABHOOTIM SAMRIDDHIM CHA SARVAA NIRNUD MEY GRIHAAT.
GANDHA DWAARAAM DURAA DHARSHAA NITYA PUSHTAAM KAREESHNEEM.
EESHWAREEM SARVA BHOOTANAAM
TAAMI HOP HAVYEY SHRIYAM.
MANSAH KAAMAM AAKUTIM VAACHAH SATYAMSHIMAHI.
PASHUNAAM PUPMANNASYA MAYI SHRIH SHREYA TAAM YASHAH.
KARDAMEYN PRAJA BHOOTA MAYIM SAMBHRAV KARDAM.
SHRIYAM VAASAYE MEY KULEY MAATARAM PADMAMAALINEEM.
AAPAH SRIJANTU SNIGHDAANI CHIKLEET VAS MEY GRIHEY.
NI CHA DEVIM MAATARAM SHRIYAM VAASAY MEY KULEY.
AARDRAAM PUSHKARINEEM PUSHTIM PINGLAAM PADMAMAA LINEEM,
CHANDRAAM HIRANYAMAYEEM LAKSHMEEM JAAT VEDO MA AAVAH.
TAAM MA AAVAH JAAT VEDO LAKSHEE
MANAPAGAAMINEEM,
YASYAAM HIRANYAM PRABHOOTEEM GAAVO DAA SYOASHVAAN VINDEYAM
PURUSHAANAHAM. YAH SHUCHIH PRAYATO BHUTVA JUHUYAA
DAAJYAM ANVAHAM,
SUKTAM PANCH DARSH CHA SHRI KAAMAH SATATAM JAPEYT.
Explanation : Oh Agni Dev (the god of fire), sages Karabh and Chikleet, help me to persuade the Goddess Lakshmi to stay in my house (Karabh and Chikleet are two of the four sons of Lakshmi. The other two sons are known as Anand and Shreet). Oh Goddess Lakshmi, I beseech you to take up residence in my house and banish poverity and misery from it. Help me to befriend Kuber (the god of wealth) so that I can lead a life of luxury and happiness surrounded by my family and friends.

MANTRA AT THE TIME OF PLACING GARLANDS OF FLOWERS
OM MAALYAA DEENEE SUGANDHEENI MAAL TYAADEENEE VAYE PRABHO,
MAYA HOOTAANI PUSHPAANI POOJAARTH PRATI GRIHYATAAM.

DHYANAM (MEDITATION) ON MAATA MAHAA KAALI
OM KHADAGAM CHAKRA GADEYSHU CHAAP PA RIGHAAN

CHHULAM BHUSHUNDIM SHRIRAH, SHAN KHAM SAND DHATIM KAREY STRI NAYNAAM
SARVAANG BHOOSHA VRITAAM.
NEELAASHM DYOOTIMAASYA PAAD
DASHKAAM SEVEY MAHA KAALI KAAM,
YAAMASTAU TASVAPITEY HARAU KAMAL JO HANTUM MADHUMKAITABHAM.

Explanation : I worship Mata Maha Kali whose help Brahma sought to kill the Rakshas, Madhu and Kaitabh. Mata Maha Kali carries a sword, a disc, a mace, a bow and arrow, a trident and a conch shell in her hands. Her body is adorned with divine ornaments and she has three eyes ten faces and ten feet.

ON MAATA MAHAA LAKSHMI

OM AKSHASTRAK PARSHUM GADESHU KULISHAM PADMAM DHANUH KUNDIKAAM
DANDAM SHAKTIMASIM CHA CHARM JALJAM GHANTAAM SURAABHAAJANAM,
SHULAM PAASH SUDARSHANEY CHA DADHTEEM HASTEYH PRASANNANNAM.
SEYVEY SAIRABHI MARDINEEMIH MAHALAKSHMEEM SAROJSTHITAAM.

Explanation: I pray to Mata Maha Lakshmi who destroyed Mahishasur. She is seated on a lotus flower and carries a rosary, a rope, a disc, a mace, a conch shell, a bell, a container for drinking honey and a shield.

ON MAATAA MAHAA SARASWATI

OM GHANTA SHOOL HALAANI SHANKH MUSALEY CHAKRAM DHANUHSHAYAKAM,
HASTAABJAIRDADHATEEM GHANAANT VILASCHITAANSHU TULYAPRABHAAM.
GAURI DEH SAMUD BHAVAAM TRI JAGATAAM AADHAAR BHOOTAAM MAHAA,
POORVAMATRA SARSWATI MANU BHAJEY SHUMBHAADI DAITYA ARDINEEM.

Explanation : Mata Sarswati carries a conch shell, a plough, a bow and arrow, a bell, a trident and a disc in her hands. She is the basis of the three worlds. She it is who destroyed the Rakshas Shumbh-Nishumbh. She was created out of the body of Gouri and has a halo like that of the moon in winter months. I pray to her.

MANTRAS FOR OFFERING INCENSE

OM VANASPATI RASOD BHOOTO GANDHAADYO GANDH UTTAMAH,
AAGHREYA SARVA DEVAA NAAM
DHOOPOAYAM PRATI GRIHYATAAM.
OM DHOORSI DHOOVRA DHOOVRA
VANTAM DHOOVRAV TAM YO ASMAAN,
DHOOVRAVATI TAM
DHOOVRAVAYAM VAYAM DHOORVAMAH.
DEVAANAAMASI VAHINTAMAH
SASNITAMAM PRAPITMAM JUSHTATAM
DEVHOOTAMAM OM DHUPAAY NAMAH.

Explanation : This has been explained earlier.

MANTRA FOR WORSHIPPING THE FLAME OF THE LAMP

OM SUPRAKAASH MAHAA DEEP SARVATASTIM RAPAH,
PRASID MAM GOVIND DEEP ARGHYAH PRATI GRIHYATAAM.
OM AGNI JYOTIR JYOTIR AGNIH SWAAHAA SURYO JYOTI JYOTIR SURYAH SWAAHAA.
AGNIR VARCHO JYOTIR VARCHAH
SWAAHAA.
SURYO VARCHO JYOTIR VARCHAH
SWAAHAA.
JYOTIH SURYAH SURYO JYOTIH SWAAHAA.
OM DEEPAEY NAMAH.

Explanation : This has been explained earlier.

MANTRA FOR NAIVAIDYA

OM NAABHYA AASID ANTRIKSHA SHEERSHANO DYOH SAMVARTAT,
PADBHYAM BHOOMIR DASHAH SHROTRAA TATHAA LOKAAM LOKAAM AKALPAYAN.
NAIVAIDYAM NIVEDYAAMI.
OM PRAANAAYA SWAAHAA OM AAPNAAYA SWAAHAA,
OM SAMAANAYA SWAAHAA OM UDAANAAY SWAAHAA,
OM VYAANAAY SWAAHAA.
NAIVAIDYANTEY PUNAR AACHMANEEYAM SAMARPAYAAMI.

Explanation : He who produced space from his navel, Heaven from his head, Earth from his feet and the directions from his ears and also created the various worlds, please accept my offering.

MANTRA FOR AARTI

OM IDAM HAVIH PRAJANANAM MEY ASTU DASHVEERAH SARV GANA SWASTAYE,
AATMSNI PRAJAASANI PASHUSNI
LOKSANYA BHAY SNI.
AGNI PRAJAAM BAHULAAM MEY KARO TVANAM PAYO RETO ASMAASU DHATTA,
AA RAATRI PAARTHIVAH RAJAAH
PITURAMPRAAYI DHAAMMIH.
DIVAH SADAA ASI BRIHATI VITISHTHHAS
AATVESHAM VARTATEY TAMAH.

Explanation : May this "Havi" be the producer of innumerable powerful and brave creatures. May this "Havi" give strength to the soul, to the people, to the animals, indeed to the entire world. May this Havi benefit me too and spread happiness and well being all around.

OM PRATHMEY GURU JI KI VANDANA
DWITEEYA AAD GANESH,
THRITEEYA SIMRAAN SHAARDA
MERE KARAJ KARO HAMESH.
AANANDI AANAND KARO KALYAANI KALYAAN,
AATHH PRAHAR CHAUSATHH GHARI DEYO CHARNAN DAA DHYAAN.

AARTI OF MAATAA VAISHNO DEVI

OM JAYA SHRI SUNDER LALITEY MAHAA
JAYA SHRI SUNDER LALITEY,
CHAKROPARI RAAJAT KAAMESHWAR SAHITEY, OM JAI.....
DEV JAYA DEV
OM SAA VINDU GUNA KONO PARI RAAJAT,
VASUKONEY MAHAA RAAJAT MAHAARAAJAT,
TAD UPARI DASH KO NA DHWAJ SHUDDH CHATUR DWAAREE,
OM JAI DEVA JAYA DEVA.
MATINDEYNDU KADAATAL BHOOSHIT GUNA RAJASEY,
MAHAA RAAJAT MAHAA RAAJAT,
TADUPARI TRIREK NIRMIT SHOBHIT MANU RAJSEY,
OM JAI DEV JAYA DEV,
SHRI CHAKROPARI RAAJAT MANU VIN MAHAA TANUTEY
MAHAARAAJAT
MAHAARAAJAT
NEERANJAN SAH TVANJEY PARAM SAFAL LALITEY,
OM JAI DEVA JAI DEVA.
TVAMM MAAM PAALAY NITYAM,
TVAAM MAAM PALAY NITYAM
MAHAARAAJAT MAHAARAAJAT
TRIKUTA JAGDAMBEY,
OM JAI DEV JAI DEV.
OM JAI SHRI SUNDAR LALITEY,
MAHAA JAI SHRI SUNDAR LALITEY,
SHRI CHAKRO PARI RAAJAT KAAMESHWAR SAHITEY,
OM JAI DEV JAI DEV.

OM AARTIRKYAM SAMAR PYAMI.
OM ONKAARAM VINDUM SANYUKTAM NITYAM DHYAY

ANTIYOGINAH
KAAMDAM MOKSHADAM CHAEV
ONKARRAAY NAMO NAMAH.
Explanation : He who is constantly worshipped by the sages and who grants salvation to all, I salute you.
OM SHANKHA MADHYA STHITAM TOYAM BHRAAMITAM DEVYOPARI,
ANGA LAGNEY MANUSHYANAM BRAHM
HATYA DIKAM HAREYT.
Explanation : You who are at the heart of the sea shell, whoever even touches you sheds off even the most heinous sins.

MANTRAS FOR OFFERING FLOWERS

OM YAGYEN YAGYA MAYA JANT
DEVAASTAANI
DHARMAANI PRATHMAA NYAASAN.
TEH NAAKAM MAHIMAANAH SACHANT YATRA
POORVEY SAADHYAH SANTI DEVAAH.
OM MAHAA DEVI CHA VIDMAHEY VISHNU
PATNI CHA DHEEMAHI .
TANNO DEVI PRACHO DAYAAT.
OM VAKRA TUNDAAYE VIDMAEHEY EK DAN TAAYE DHEE MAHI.
TANNO DANTI PRACHO DAYAAT.
OM NAA NAA SUGANDHI PUSHPAANI RITU KAALO BHAWAANEE CHA.
PUSHPAANJALI MARYAADATTA GRIHAAN PARMESHWARI.
I have heard of the Goddess from the teachers and the scriptures and have tried to mediate upon her.
I Now beseech the same Goddess Vaishanavi to motivate me to meditate upon her.
I have heard of Lord Ganesh from the teachers and scriptures and have meditated upon him.
I pray to Lord Ganesh to motivate me to meditate upon him.
I have prepared this collection of flowers by procuring flowers which grow in this season from different places. Oh, great Goddess, kindly accept my offering of flowers.

S T U T I

HEY MAAT MERI, HEY MAAT MERI HEY MAAT MERI, HEY MAAT MERI,
KAISEE YEH DEYREE LAGAAI HAI DURGEY,
HEY MAAT MERI , HEY MAAT MERI.
BHAV SAAGAR MEY GIRAA PADAA HOON
KAAM AADI GRAH SEY GHIRAA PADAA HOON,
MOH AADI JAALON MEY JAKDA PADAA HOON,
HEY MAAT MERI HEY MAAT MERI.
NA MUJH MEY BAL HAI NA MUJH MEY VIDYA,
NA MUJH MEY BHAKTI NA MUJH MEY
SHAKTI, SHARAN TUMHAARI GIRAA PADA HOON, HEY MAAT MERI , HEY MAAT MERI.
NA MERA KOI KUTUMB SAATHI , NA HI MERAA SHAREER SAATHI,
AAP HEE UBHARO PAKAD KE BAHEN,
HEY MAAT MERI HEY MAAT MERI.
CHARAN KAMAL KEE NAUKAA
BANAA KAR, MAIN PAAR HOONGAA KHUSHI MANAA KAR,
YAM DOOTON KO MAAR
BHAGAAKAR , HEY MAAT MERI HEY MAAT MERI.
SADAA HEE TERE GUNON KO GAAOON,
SADAA HEE TERE SWAROOP KO DHYAOON,
NIT PRATI TERE GUNON KO GAAOON,
HEY MAAT MERI HEY MAAT MERI.
NA MAIN KISSI KAA NA KOI MERAA,
CHHAYAA HAI CHARO AUR ANDHERA,
PAKAD KE JYOTI MAA DIKHAAO RASTA ,
HEY MAAT MERI HEY MAAT MERI.
SHARAN PADE HAIN HUM TUMHARI,
KARO YEH NAIYAA PAAR HAMARI,
KAISEE YEH DERI LAGAAYEE HEY JANANI,
HEY MAAT MERI HEY MAAT MERI.

OM TVAMEV MAATAA CHA PITA TVAMEV
TVAMEV BANDHUSHCHA SAKHAA TVAMEV,
TVAMEV VIDYA CHADRAVINAM TVAMEV
TVAMEV SARVAM MAM DEV DEV.

OM SHAANTAAKAARAM BHUJAG SHAYANAM PADMANAABHAM SURESHAM,
VISHWAADHAARAM GAGAN SADRISHAM MEGHAVARNAM SHUBHAANGAM,
SHRI LAKSHMIKAANTAM KAMALNAYANAM YOGIBHIR DHYAANGAMYAM,
VANDEVISHNU BHAVBHAYAHARAM
SARVLOKEY EKNAATHAM.
OM ACHYUTAM KESHAVAM RAAM
NAARAAYANAM KRISHAN DAAMODARAM,
VAASUDEVAM HARIM,
SHRIDHARAM MAADHAVAM GOPIKAA VALLABHAM
JAANAKI NAAYAKAM SHRIRAAM CHANDRAM BHAJE.
OM HAREY MURAAREY MADHU KAITABHAREY GOVIND GOPAAL MUKUND KISHOREY,
GYANAM PRADEHI SHARNAM PRADEHI VIDYA PRADEHI BHAGWAN NAMO STUTEY.

SAANCHE DARBAR KI JAI.

SACHIYAN JOTAN VAALI MAATAA TERI SADAA HEE JAI.
PANCH PHOOLAN RAANI MAATAA TERI SADAA HI JAI.
SARVATRA DA BHALAA KARAN VAALI MAATAA TERI SADA HI JAI.
SAARE SANSAAR VICH SHANTI DEYN VAALI MAATAA TERI SADA HI JAI.
LAUNKARA VEER THAKUR TERI SADAA HI JAI.
BOL SAANCHEY DARBAR KI JAI.

DURGEY SMRITA HARSI BHEETIM SHESH JANTOH,
SWASTHEYHSMRITA MATIMATEEV
SHUBHAM DADAASI.
DAARIDRYA DUKHBHAYAHAARINI KATVADANYA,
SARVOPKAAR KARNAAYE SADA
ARDRACHITTA.
Explanation : Oh Goddess Durga, you remove the fear of all those who think of you and grant them a sharp mind. You are always busy in doing good to the others.
SARVA MANGALA MAANGALYE
SHIVEYSARVAARTH SAADHIKEY,
SHARNAYE TRAYAMBAKEY
GAURI NAARAAYANI NAMOSTUTEY.
Explanation : Oh Narayaani, Oh Shivi, Oh Gauri you fulfil the desires of all. I pray to you.
SHARNAAGAT DEENAART PARITRAAN PARAAYANEY,
SERVASYARTI HAREY DEVI NAARAAYANI NAMOSTUTEY.
Explanation : You who are perpetually endeavouring to protect the weak and the poor and remove their misery. Oh Narayani, I pray to you.
SARVASVAROOPEY SARVESHEY
SARVSHAKTI SAMANVIETEY,
BHAYEBHYAH TRAAHI NODEVI
DURGEYNAMOSTUTEY.
Explanation : Oh Goddess Durga, please protect us from all kinds of fear. Oh Omnipotent Durga I pray to you.
ROGAAN SHOSHAAN
PAHANSITUSHTARUSHTATU
KAAMAAN SAKLAAN BHISHTAAN,
TVAAM AASHRITAANAAM NA
VIPANNARAANAM

TVAAMAASHRITAAHYA
SHRAYTAAM PRAYAANTI.
Explanation : Oh Goddess, when you are pleased you remove all ailments and when you are angry you destroy everything that a person desires for. However, those who come to you for sanctuary never have to confront any catastrophy. Instead, such people secure enough merit to provide shelter to others.
SARVA BADHAA PRASHMANAM TRAILOKYA SYAKHILESHWARI,
EVAMEV TVAYAA KAARYAM SMA DVERI VISAASHNAM.
SARVAA BAADHAA VINIRUMKTO DHAN DHAANYA SUTAAN VITAH.
MANUSHYO MAT PRASAADEN BHAVISHYATI NA SANSHA YAH.
Explanation : Whoever listens to the story of the Goddess during the great Puja that is organised in the winters succeeds in overcoming all obstacles and is blessed with wealth and progeny.
JYANTI MANGALAA KAALI BHADRA KAALI KAPAALINEE,
DURGAA KSHAMAA SHIVAA DHAATREE SWAAHAA SVADHAA NAMO STUTEY.
Explanation : Oh Goddess, you who are known by the names of Mangala, Kali, Bhadra Kali, Kapalinee, Durga, Kshamaa, Shivaa, Dhatri, Swahaa, Swadha, I pray to you.
DEHI SAUBHAAGYAM AAROGYAM DEHI MEY PARAMAM SUKHAM,
RUPAM DEHI JAYAM DEHI YASHO DEHI DVISHO JAHI.
Explanation : Oh Goddess, bless me with good fortune, good health, good looks, success and fame.
VIDEHI DEVI KALYANAM VIDEHI
PARMASHRIYAM ,
RUPAM DEHI JAYAM DEHI YASHO DEHI DVISHO JAHI.
Explanation : Oh Goddess, bless me with success, beauty, wealth and fame and save me from the evils of anger, desire, hate etc.
TVAM VAISHNAVI SHAKTIR NANT VIRYA VISHVASYA BIJAM PARAM ASI MAAYAA,
SAMMOHITAM DEVI SAMASTAMETAT TVAM VAI PRASAN NAA BHUVI MUKTI HETUH.
Explanation : Oh Vaishnavi, you are omnipotent, you are the very basis for the World. You have mesmerised the World. When you are pleased with some one you ensure his salvation from the cycle of life and death.

PRAYER BESEECHING FORGIVENESS

APRAADH SAHASTRAANI KRIYANTEY HARNISHAM MAYAA,
DAASO YAMITI MAAN MATVAA KSHAMASV PARMESH WARI.
Explanation : I commit thousands of sins everyday. Oh Goddess, please think of me as your slave and pardon my crimes.
AA VAAHANAM NA JANAAMI NA JANAAMI VISARJANAM,
POOJAAM CHAEV NAJANAAMI
KSHBHYATAAM PARMESHWARI.
Explanation : I know not how to call you, nor how to appease you. Nor do I know how to worship you. Oh God dess, please forgive me.
MANTRA HEENAM KRIYA HEENAM BHAKTI HEENAM SURESHWAREE,
YAT PUJITAM MAYAA DEVI PARI POORNA TADASTU MEY.
Explanation : Oh, Sureshwari, this Puja that I have performed has been done without the chanting of proper mantras, or the performing of proper actions. Indeed, it has also been bereft of any devotion. Yet, I entreat you to make this Puja successful.
APRAADH SHATAM KRITVAA JAGDAMBETI CHOHRET,
YAAM GATIM SAMNAANPOTINATAAM BRAMA DAYAH SURAAH.
Explanation : He who seeks sanctuary in you even after committing hundreds of crimes and calls out your name "Jagdambikay" attains the kind of salvation which is not easily available to even the Devas.
SAAPRAADHO ASMI SHARANAM PRAAPTAH TVAAM JAGDAMBIKEY,
IDAANEEM ANUKAMPAYO AHAM
YATHECHHASI TATHAAKURU.
Explanation : Oh Goddess, I am a sinner, yet I have come to you for refuge. I deserve mercy. Please do with me as you please.
AGYAANADI VISMRITEY BHRAANTYA YANYOONAM ADHIKAM KRITAM,
TATSARVAM KSHAMYATAAM DEVI PRASEED PARMESHWARI.
Explanation : Oh Goddess Parmeshwari, please pardon whatever excesses or shortcomings I have committed as a result of ignorance, loss of memory or misunderstanding.
KAAMESHWARI JAGANMAATAH
SACHIDDANAND VIGRAHEY,
GRIHAANAAR CHAMIM AAM PREETYA PRASEED PARMESHWARI.
Explanation : Oh Goddess, please accept my prayers and I beseech you to shower your blessings upon me constantly.
GUHYAATI GUHYA GOPTREE TVAM GRIHAA
NAASMATKRITAM JAPAM,
SIDDHIRBHAVATU MEYDEVI
TVATPRASAADAAT SURESHWARI.
Explanation : Oh Goddess, you are the protector of the most secret of things. Please accept my prayers and grant me salvation.

GLOSSARY

Aradhya Dev : A God personal to the worshipper.

Atka : Collection counter set up by Dharmarth.

Aarti : Worship by singing and chanting aloud the praise of a God or a Goddess.

Achman : Self purification by drinking holy water after accepting it in the palm of the hand. This is done before commencing Puja.

Adhkwari : The eternal virgin.

Ain-i-Dharmarth : The constitution of Dharmarth.

Aksha Mala : Indestructible rosary.

Apsaras : Nymphs or beautiful semi-divine women expert in the art of allurement and seduction.

Argha : Water mixed with milk, rice, grass etc. which is offered by releasing before a Deva or a great person with great devotion.

Amrit : Nectar.

Ashram : Hermitage.

Asuras : Huge powerful men who were deemed to be traditionally the enemies of the Devas. They are supposed to represent the darker (demonic) aspect of life.

Atam Puja : Worship of the self.

Atharva Ved : On of the four vedas.

Bari : Turn.

Baridar : The person whose turn it is.

Banganga : A stream which jetted out of the earth after the Goddess had shot an arrow into it. The Banganga flows as a perennial stream on the route to Vaishno Devi Ji.

Bazaars : Markets.

Brahman : One of the four castes in whch the Hindu society is divided as per the caste classification done by the sage Manu. The other three castes are Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra.

Brahma : One out of the trinity of the Primary Hindu Gods. The other two Gods in the trinity are Vishnu and Shankar.

Bhandara : A public feast cum religious ceremony organised to honour a deity or an ancestor.

Bhaint : Gift, offering.

Bhu Lok : Earth.

Chhabil : Drinking water point.

Charan Ganga : A stream of water emanting from the base of the Holy Pindies and deemed to be as holy as the water of river Ganga.

Charan Paduka : A place enroute Vaishno Devi Ji where the imprint of the feet of the Goddess are visible. A small temple has been constructed here.

Chartal : Offering made in the form of money.

Chola : A piece of cloth shaped like an open jacket; Blouse.

Chatter : Umbrella. (A royal insignia).

Chanwar : A fly whisk.(A royal insignia)

Chandrama : The Moon.

Charanamrit : Water blessed by God.

Chakra : Discuss.

Charan : Feet.

Chunni : Veil, a piece of cloth.

Danda : Iron rod.

Darshani Darwaza : The doorway or the place from where the pilgrim commences the actual journey on foot to the Shrine.

Darshan : To get or have a view.

Dakshina : Donation made for charitable purposes.

Daridra Narayan : Extremely poor; one who has no material possession and is thus untouched by greed.

Deenee : A rudimentary torch prepared by lighting up a stick/branch of a chir (pine) tree.These branches burn very well for an extended period due to the resin contained in the wood.

Deep : Lamp.

Deep Shikha : A metal container shaped like a branch containing a number of lamps.

Devas : Lesser Gods of the Hindu Pantheon.

Dev Lok : The abode of the Gods.

Dhoop : Incense.

Dhaar : Hill.

Dhoti : A piece of cloth tied round the waist and reaching down to below the knees.

Dhaba : A shop selling cooked food.

Dharmashastras : Religious texts.

Dharamshala : Public halting place open to travellers without any charge.

Dhadh : Torso.

Dharmarth : An organisation setup by the Dogra Maharajas to look after religious and charitable work.

Dona : A cup made of leaves.

Five Pandavas : The five brothers, Yudhishthar, Bhim, Arjun, Nakul and

Sehdev. They are the heroes of the Hindu epic MAHABHARAT and were the victors in the war between the Kauravas and the Pandavas.

Gada : Mace.

Ganesh : The elephant headed god of the Hindu Pantheon. He is invoked whenever an auspicious act is to be performed.

Garabh : The womb.

Garabh Joon : The narrow cave at Adhkawari where the Goddess spent nine months. It is quite difficult to enter this cave and wriggle out of it yet any one who makes an attempt is successful in negotiating it.

Ganga : The holy Indian river; holy; sacred.

Gharat : Water mill.

Ghee : Clarified butter

Guru : Teacher.

Halwa: A sweet delicacy prepared from ground wheat, clarified butter, sugar and saffron.

Havan Kund: The pit where the sacred fire is lit for performing a Yagya or Havan.

Homa : Offering in a Yagya.

Indra : One of the lesser Gods of the Hindu pantheon. He was the king of the Devas.

Jai Mata Di : Victory to the Goddess.

Jaikara : Exhortation for Victory.

Joon/Yoni : The female. genetalia.

Kah : Grass.

Kaliyug : One of the aeons. As per Hindu belief, we are passing through this aeon now. This will be followed by the destruction of the world as we know it. The other three aeons or Yugas as per the Hindu belief are Satyug, Treta Yug, and Dwaper Yug.

Kailash : The mountain where Shankar lives.

Kamandal : Container.

Kamdhenu : The divine cow which can fulfil all desires.

Kanya : Virgin girl.

Kanjak : Virgin girl.

Kanya Poojan : Worship of virgin girls.

Kandi Belt : A dry, rocky area with infertile soil in the Jammu region of the State of Jammu and Kashmir.

Khamba : Pillar.

Khetri : Crops.

Kutia : Hut.

Kutcha : Temporary; that which is not permanent.

Lakh : One Hundred Thousand.

Langoor : Black faced monkeys.

Lathi Charge : Baton attack (by the police)

Launkra Beer : A symbol of Hanuman, the devoted follower of Ram; the monkey god.

Mata : Mother.

Mahisha : Buffalo.

Mahishi : Female Buffalo.

Mandali : Group of people.

Mantra : Spell.

Maya : Illusion.

Medas : Earth, fat.

Moksha : Salvation. Escape from the cycle of birth and death due to which the soul merges with God.

Nallah : Stream, Rivulet.

Naived : Offering of food to God.

Navratras : Nine days and nights devoted to praying, fasting and worshipping the goddess. They occur twice every year, once before the onset of summer and the rsecond time before the onset of winter.

Nidra : Sleep.

Paapi : Sinner.

Paap : Sin.

Paash : Lasso.

Paddhati : Procedure.

Padmasana : One of the ways of sitting practised by those proficient in the art of yoga.

Padam : Lotus flower.

Palki/Dandi : Palanquin.

Panch Amrit : The five nectars

Parikrama : Perambulation, usually of a temple.

Parshu : Battle axe.

Path : Recitation.

Pattal : A plate made of leaves.

Patal Lok : The sub-terranean World . As per the Hindu belief there are seven worlds below our world. Patal Lok is the lowest of the seven worlds. The names of seven worlds as per the Puranas are :- ATAL, VITAL,SUTAL, RASATAL, TALATAL, MAHATAL and PATAL.

Panch Agni : The five fires. One of the ways of performing severe Tapasaya is by sitting for meditation in summer months while surrounded by the five fires.

Paduka : Shoes.

Pashupati Nath : Lord of the animals.

Parvati : The wife of Shiv.

Puja : Worship.

Prasad : Food blessed by God.

Pindies : Unhewn images of rock.

Pratishthit : Consecrated, respected.

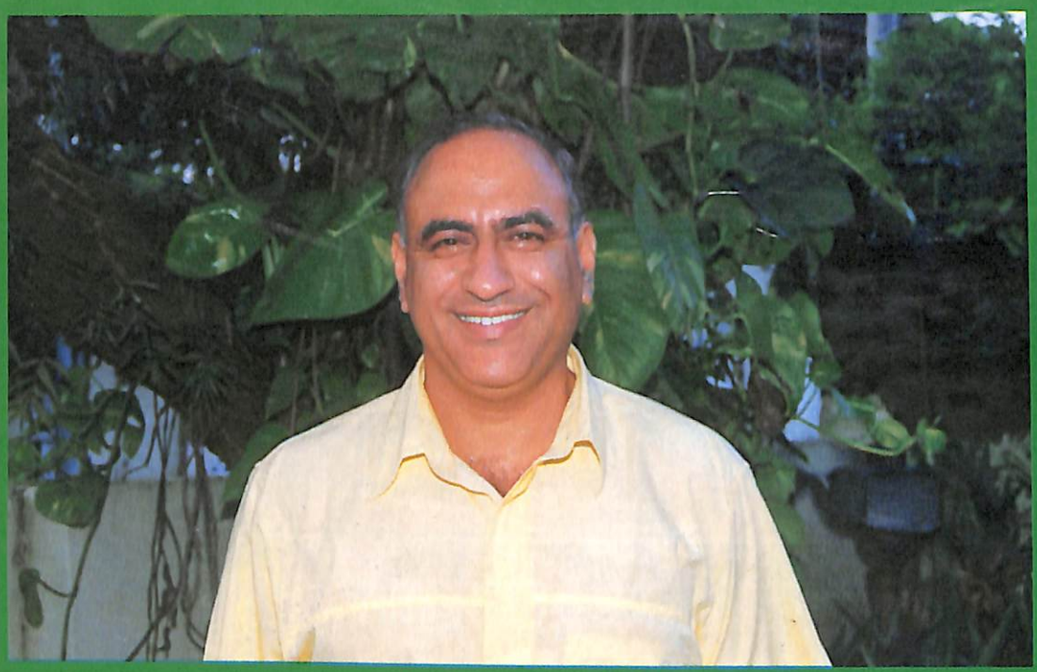
Prayog : Penance.

Prayogi : A man who performs penance.

Prahlad : A legendary devotee of God. His father, Hiranyakashap wanted Prahlad to worship him

	as God because Hiranyakashap had the power of life and death over everyone. Prahlad refused to accept his father as God. Enraged Hiranyakashap ordered Prahlad to embrace a burning pillar and challenged him to invoke his "real god" to save his life. Prahalad embraced the flaming pillar fearlessing while chanting the name of God and came out of this ordeal unscathed.
Prithvi :	The Earth.
Pratigyaa Sankalp :	A mantra chanted for announcing a vow.
Pujari :	Hindu priest; worshipper of the Goddess.
Puri :	Fried cake of flour.
Puja :	Worship.
Sadhus :	Ascetics.
Sadhvi :	A female ascetic.
Sadavrat :	Place for distribution of food to the travellers.
Safai Karamchari :	Cleaning, sanitation, staff.
Sahayak :	Security Staff appointed by the Shri Mata Vaishno Devi Shrine Board.
Sanhar :	Destruction.
Sankalp :	Vow
Sapt Rishi :	The seven sages—Marichi, Atri, Angiras, Pulastya, Pulaha, Krtu and Vashishtha. They are rated anongst the wisest sages of all times.
Sari :	A garment worn by Indian women. It is usualy six yards long.
Sati :	The ritual where the wife used to burn herself to death on the funeral pyre along with the dead body of her husband.
Shakti :	Power; strength; force; the female energy.
Shankar :	One out of the trinity of the Primary Hindu Gods. The other two Gods in the Trinity are Brahma and Vishnu.
Shankh :	Conch shell.
Shakti :	Flaming dart; Energy; Power
Shesh Nag :	The cosmic snake with the thousand heads. Sheshnag, as per mythology, is carrying the weight of the Universe on his head.
Shraap :	Curse.
Shuddhi :	Purification.
Sindoor :	A red powder usually worn by married Indian women on the parting of the hair on the head.
Sinh Raj :	The lion; the mount of the goddess.
Sthapita :	Established.
Surya :	The Sun.
Swayam Bhu :	Self revealed.
Tapasya :	Asceticism; Penance; a combination of devotion meditation, prayers and fasting
Tatha Astu :	"So shall it be". The words uttered by a god or a goddess while granting a boon.
Tejas :	Energy.
Thakkars :	An agricultural community in Jammu and Kashmir.
Than :	Udders of a cow.
Thaal :	Metal plate.
Tilak :	An auspicious mark applied on the forehead.
Tirath :	A place of pilgrimage.
Trikuta Mountain :	The mountain with the three peaks. The abode of Mata Vaishno Devi Ji.
Trishul :	Trident, a weapon.
Vard Hast :	The hand held out in the mode of bestowing blessings.
Vaikuntha :	The place where Vishnu lives.
Vajra :	The invincible thunderbolt, the weapon of Indra , the King of the Devas.
Vakra Tund Ganesh :	Ganesh with the curved trunk.
Vedas :	The ancient sciptures of the Hindus.There are four Vedas. These are Rig ved, Sama ved, Yajur ved and Atharva ved.
Viniyog :	Division or Department; experiment.
Vishnu :	One out of the Trinity of the Primary Hindu Gods. The other two Gods in the Trinity are Brahma and Shankar.
Vrata :	Vow, especially where food is forsaken for a particular period.
Yagya :	A ritual which dates back to the Vedas in which offerings of various kinds are made to the sacred fire in order to propitiate the Gods.
Yaksha:	Semi-divine beings who are appointed by Kuber, the God of wealth, to protect his treasure.
Yatra :	Pilgrimage.
Yatri :	Pilgrim.
Yantra :	A mystical diagram supposed to possess occult powers.
Yog Nidra :	The name of the Goddess when she induces sleep.

ॐ ऐं ह्रीं क्लीं चामुण्डायै विच्चे



Anil Goswami, IAS

Mr. Anil Goswami was born in Jammu, in the State of Jammu & Kashmir on 14th Jan. 1955. He had his education in schools, colleges and Universities located in different parts of India. He was selected for the Indian Administrative Service (IAS) in 1978 and has been working in Jammu & Kashmir since then. Mr. Goswami has held many senior positions in the Government and has been associated with the development of the holy Shrine of Mata Vaishno Devi Ji since the take over of its management by a Statutory Board in 1986. Mr. Goswami lives with his family in Jammu.

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